3
鎌池和馬
イラスト・依河和希
未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン
The unexplored summon://blood-sign III
電撃文庫

Table of Contents

Illustrations
Battle Tutorial
Prologue
Facts
Opening X-01: Let’s Settle This Once and For All
Facts
Opening X-02: Midair Battle, Altitude 5000m
Facts
Stage 01: A Transfer Student in Early Spring Signals the Collapse of the School
Part 1
Part 2
Part 3
Part 4
Or a Story Set Somewhat in the Past
Facts
Stage 02: The Scheming and True Beginning of the Girl’s Backdoor
Part 1
Part 2
Part 3
Part 4
Part 5
Part 6
Part 7
Part 8
Part 9
Facts
Stage 03: The Rabbit Guide and the Liar Cat
Part 1
Part 2
Part 3
Part 4
Part 5
Part 6
Part 7
Part 8

Part 9
Or a Story Set Further in the Past
Facts
Stage 04: Revenge and the Plan for Perfect Vessels
Part 1
Part 2
Part 3
Part 4
Part 5
Part 6
Facts
Ending X-01: The Girls’ Slight Hope
Facts
Ending X-02: A Demonstration of the White Queen’s True Character
Facts
Afterword
Credits

Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign - Volume 03

Contents

- Illustrations
- Battle Tutorial
- Prologue
- Opening X-01: Let’s Settle This Once and For All
- Opening X-02: Midair Battle, Altitude 5000m
- Stage 01: A Transfer Student in Early Spring Signals the Collapse of the School
- Stage 02: The Scheming and True Beginning of the Girl’s Backdoor
- Stage 03: The Rabbit Guide and the Liar Cat
- Stage 04: Revenge and the Plan for Perfect Vessels
- Ending X-01: The Girls’ Slight Hope
- Ending X-02: A Demonstration of the White Queen’s True Character
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未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン③

鎌池和馬

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未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン③

神々の先にいる『未踏級』の存在でありながら使役する『最強の召喚師』城山恭介。

彼は今、闇夜を翔けていた。

あらゆる乙女を自在に操る夢のデバイス『少女使い』。混沌を呼ぶその端末を街にバラ撒く復讐者を討つために。

難敵に対抗すべく恭介が選んだ『依代』は、『ガバメント』所属の無口系天然軍服少女・イザベルだった。

そして二人は復讐者と対峙する。『仇染め』の異名を持つ『彼女』は『フリーダム』所属のアワード920。つまり、アワード903『不殺王』の恭介の、さらに先に潜む『最強』で……！

鎌池和馬

このシリーズを始めてから、風景を眺める時も注目すべき場所はちょいちょい変わってきたかもしれません。そんなこんなで今日も今日とてボールが飛び跳ねたら面白そうな場所を探索中。

【電撃文庫作品】

とある魔術の禁書目録①～㉒
とある魔術の禁書目録SS①②
新約 とある魔術の禁書目録①～⑬
ヘヴィーオブジェクトシリーズ 計9冊
インテリビレッジの座敷童①～⑦
簡単なアンケートです
簡単なモニターです
ヴァルトラウテさんの婚活事情
未踏召喚：//ブラッドサイン①～③
とある魔術のヘヴィー な連載恋が簡単な殺人鬼の婚活事情

イラスト：依河和希

月刊コミック電撃大王にて『魔法科高校の劣等生 追憶編』連載の傍ら、『DOG DAYS』のアニメ版機能も揺くマルチクリエーター。好きな虫が物はカキフライ。

電撃文庫

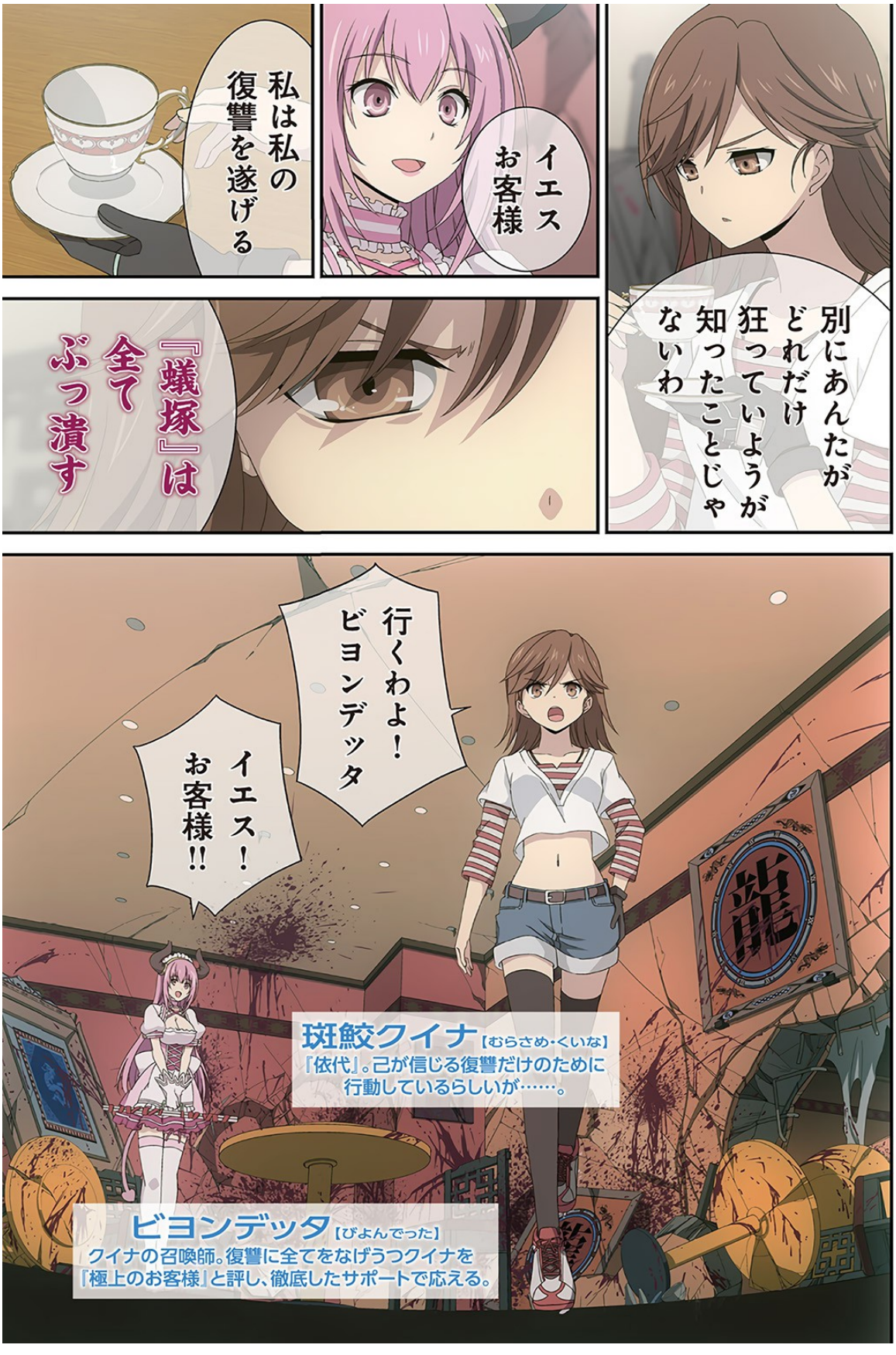
未踏召喚://ブラッドサイン
3
鎌池和馬
イラスト：依河和希

ん…
…？
……
というか
もぞ…
こんなに大胆に
触られると
イザベルも
細盛り程度には
対応に困る
イザベル【いざべる】
召喚師組織三大勢力の一角『ガバメント』所属の依代。
城山恭介と契約を交わす。言葉遣いがすこし変。

冥乃河姉妹【めいのかわ・しまい】
左が双子の妹・彼岸（ひがん）で、
右が姉の蓮華（れんげ）。
二人とも恭介に救われた過去を持つ。

城山恭介【しろやま・きょうすけ】
『フリーダム』に所属する当代最強の召喚師。
しかしてその正体は……当代普通の高校生。

ビヨンデッタには
付き合わせて
悪いと思ってるわ
何を
おっしゃいます
私はとても
これ以上ないくらいに
充実していますもの!!
お客様の復讐心は
かなりの高水準
安易に変質
することなく
尻すぼみに
消えてしまう
ことなく
最初のままに
保ち続けるだ
なんて!


別にあんたがどれだけ狂っていようが知ったことじゃないわ
イエスお客様
私は私の復讐を遂げる
『蟻塚』は全てぶっ潰す
行くわよ！ビヨンデッタ
イエス！お客様!!
龍
斑鮫クイナ【むらさめ・くいな】
『依代』。己が信じる復讐だけのために行動しているらしいが……。
ビヨンデッタ【びよんでった】
クイナの召喚師。復讐に全てをなげうつクイナを『極上のお客様』と評し、徹底したサポートで応える。

ひとたび
『呪いの言葉』を
放たれたら最後。
それだけで
彼らは神話の神々さえ
踏み台にする
絶大な力を授けるのだ。
踏みにじられた
尊厳を助け
笑顔を守るために――

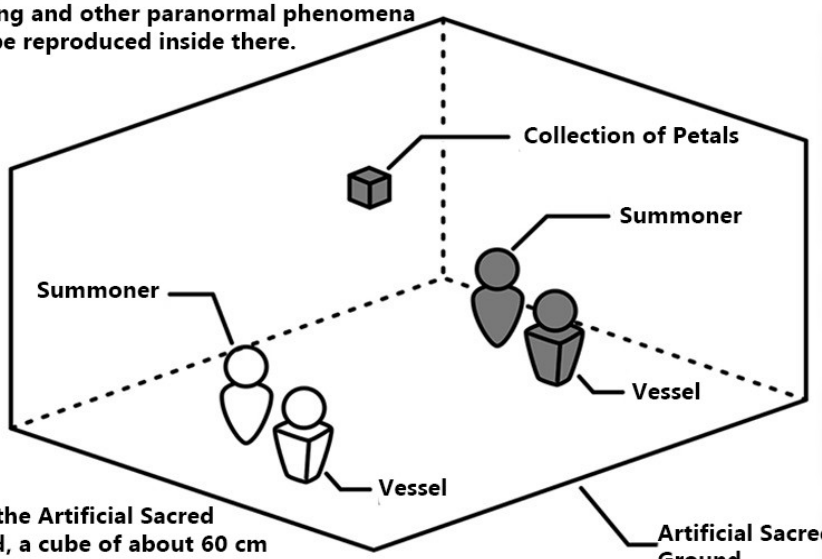
それでも
僕は
ええ
私は
人を助けることを
絶対にやめない!!!

Battle Tutorial

The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.

phase 1

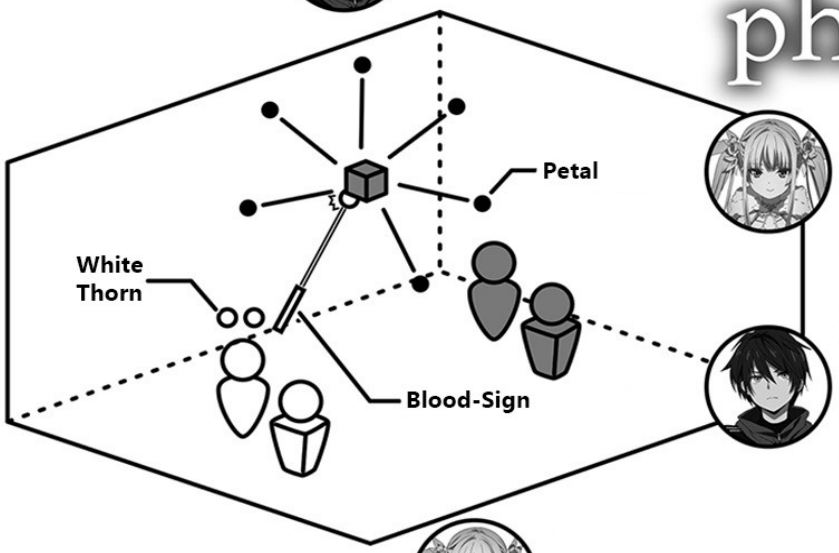
When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.



Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.

It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

phase 2



3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.

You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.

What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.

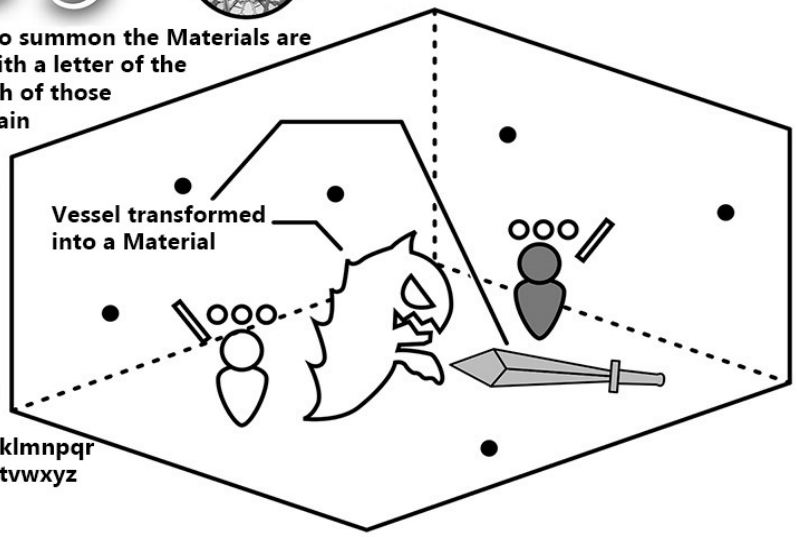
And the vessel's body is used to create...

Battle Tutorial of "The unexplored summon://blood-sign"

phase 3

...a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.

The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.



aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

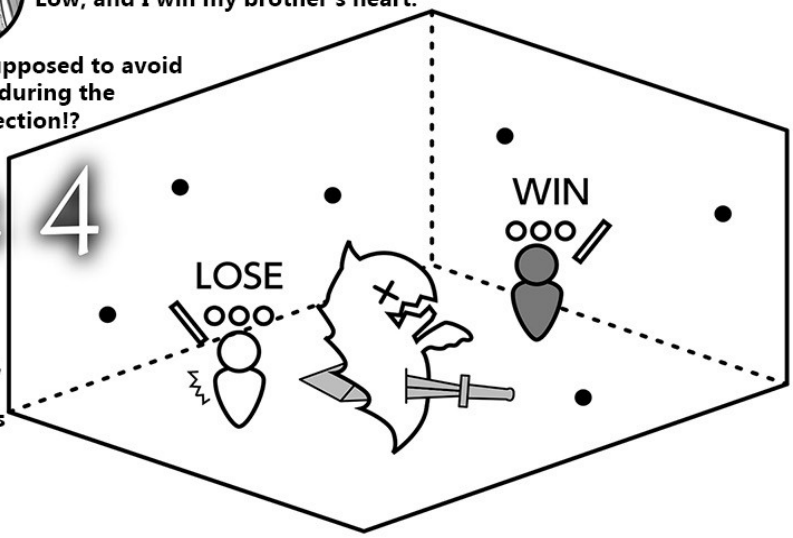
There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.

Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.

Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

phase 4

And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.



The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.

The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.

And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000...hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Phase 1
Upper Cube: Collection of Petals
Left Dark Figure: Summoner
Right Dark Figure: Vessel
Left White Figure: Summoner
Right White Figure: Vessel
Overall Box: Artificial Sacred Ground

K: The Summoning Battle begins when one of the summoners uses an Incense Grenade.
Q: When the Incense Grenade is used, an Artificial Sacred Ground forms around them. Summoning and other paranormal phenomena can only be reproduced inside there.
Q: Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a cube of about 60 cm appears at the midpoint between the summoners.
K: It is a collection of the 216 Petals which are red spheres about the size of an apple.

Phase 2
Dark Ball: Petal
White Ball: White Thorn
White Stick: Blood-Sign

Q: 3 white spheres known as White Thorns appear with each summoner. Those are hit with a long staff known as a Blood-Sign and they collide with the Petals.
K: You hit the Petals with the White Thorns in order to knock them into the spherical Spots that appear in 36 locations inside the Artificial Sacred Ground.
Q: What Petals are hit into the Spots changes what can be summoned.
K: And the vessel's body is used to create…

Phase 3
White Monster and Dark Sword: Vessel transformed into a Material

Q: …a Material. The summoners use them for a fight to the death.
K: The Petals used to summon the Materials are each engraved with a letter of the alphabet and each of those belongs to a certain Sound Range.
Q: aiueo are vowels and thus the Lowest Sound Range. As for the consonants, bcdfghj are Low, klmnpqr are Middle, and stvwxyz are High.

K: There are of course rules governing the summoned Materials and they are based on the Petals' rules.
Q: Low wins against High, High wins against Middle, Middle wins against Low, and I win my brother's heart.
K: Weren't we supposed to avoid making jokes during the explanation section!?

Phase 4
K: And after the vessels transform into Materials, they continued to be updated into new forms as they fight.
Q: The Materials start at Regulation-class. After summoning 100 of those, you gain the right to summon the higher Divine-class. And after summoning 50 of those, you gain the right to summon the even higher Unexplored-class.
K: The vessel has a core known as their Silhouette. If that is destroyed, the battle ends. The losing summoner and vessel will become dolls that wander around in a stupor.
Q: And that concludes our simple explanation of the Summoning Battle. As a summoner fights more and more battles, they earn more titles known as Awards. And if their number of Awards reaches 1000…hee hee hee. Now, I wonder what happens then.

Prologue

Brother, what do you picture when you think of the ultimate power?
Hee hee hee. I don't mind if I'm the first thing that pops into your mind, but that doesn't make for much of a discussion. Honestly, this isn't easy when you know the answer from the beginning.
Do you think of the physical strength to smash a mountain? Do you think of a cannon with an extraordinary firing range? Do you think of perfect stealth that lets you escape everyone's senses? Do you think of a master at information warfare who can wear down the enemy's teamwork?
That's what this is about.
But strength and power do not exist in a vacuum. A process and effort are needed to obtain them, obtaining them creates obligations, and measures are needed to control them. Unless we're talking about an extreme irregularity like me, all living things are influenced by that power. Just as people obtain power, power obtains people. It would probably be easier to think of it like analyzing an insect that has evolved as it pleased and specialized in a certain function.
Now, how about a hypothetical?
What if there was a power that could control people just as you control Materials?
And I'm not talking about just any old person. It could be that girl in your class who is always by your side, a beautiful woman you've never met that you see passing by on the street, or a princess you could never hope to reach. What if you could control all of them with your desires on full display? Would you be able to retain your human heart?
Oh, dear.
Look at that upset face. Brother, did you realize this could be more than just a hypothetical if you analyzed and reconstructed the already optimized Summoning Ceremony? Hee hee. It looks like a few formulas have already appeared in your mind. But if someone had that power, how would that power bind them?
Would nothing actually change?
Would they abandon their rational mind and become an animal?
Would they get sick of everything and fall into depression?
Would they be able to conquer the entire population of the world but find themselves unable to control their beloved?
Hmm, what would it be with you, brother?

Of course, if you fell for a girl other than me and tried to have your way with her, I might just smash an earth or two☆

Facts

- There are only two types of people. The controllers and the controlled. …If you actually think that, I’m going to die of laughter.

Opening X-01: Let’s Settle This Once and For All

“Oh, Onii-chan. I’m cooking a meal for-…”
“Oh, honestly!! This is already leading to my death, isn’t it!?”
(Opening X-01 Open 05/20 12:30)
Let’s Settle This Once and For All

It was midday on May 20.
Once Golden Week ended, May grew much duller.
That may have been why Shiroyama Kyousuke, the skilled summoner also known as Freedom Award 903, Alice (with) Rabbit, had let his guard down.
(Honestly, why do I need all this money to retire? Now I’m stuck getting help from Aika as a middleman…)
As soon as he opened the door to Aika’s apartment like usual and caught a whiff of that odor, he should have turned right around. No, he should have noticed when he placed his hand on the doorknob. And he should have run out of there as quickly as possible, even if it meant jumping down the elevator shaft.
(Nothing good ever comes from the jobs that Government hires Freedom for, but this will be the last one. I can put up with just a little more.)
But he carelessly stepped inside.
He heard a cheerful girl humming some kind of tune down the hall.
When he walked on in, he found Aika wearing an apron over her white and green striped bikini that looked mint-flavored.
She looked back from the large kitchen area and spoke.
“Oh, Onii-chan. I’m cooking a meal for-…”
“Oh, honestly!! This is already leading to my death, isn’t it!?”
He could hear it. It was a bizarre sound like gas bubbling up from the depths of a horrible bog. He heard something flopping on the chopping block and heard hard bones being cut with a thick knife. What was that? What was she doing? Kyousuke’s eyes were already bulging and something other than the name of a dish came to mind: *Oh, come to think of it, didn’t*

the firefighters find an old man who had turned to soup after he died while reheating the bathwater?
“Ah!? C-come to think of it, where’s Lu-san? She can cook like a normal human being. If she was supervising Aika, then this should still be within the acceptable limits of mankind!!”
“Yeah, she was supervising me…”
“Oh, I see. Good. Tell me that sooner. Now there’s nothing to worry-…”
But he trailed off.
She “was” supervising her? Why was that in the past tense?
He found the answer before long.
With no warning, the cupboard’s large door opened outwards. No one had touched it, so it had to have been pushed open from within. Then something fell out. The person who collapsed to the floor and stopped moving was Lu Niang Lan in her modified China dress.
“L-Lu-san!?”
“……
……”
There is no response. It is merely an empty shell.
But in all seriousness, Lu Niang Lan’s look of peaceful rest had grown ashen. People called that a pallor of death. Something red dripped from the corner of her mouth, but it may have been ketchup. However, he could not help but see it as blood.
“Y-you fool. Did you start feeling sorry for her as you watched, Lu-san? Did you decide to taste Aika’s cooking…no, test it for poison!?”
“Tch. You noticed. Anyway, yours will be ready soon, Onii-chan. Take a seat and wait.”
“You’re not even giving me time to collect the body!?”
Kyousuke reached into his hoodie’s pocket. Instead of an Incense Grenade for the Summoning Ceremony, he pulled out a military stun grenade used as a smokescreen. It looked exactly the same, so it was useful for cruelly blinding a careless summoner and then pummeling them the old fashioned way.
He pulled the pin.
But…
“Liger.”
A carnivore larger than a tiger or lion caught the airborne hairspray-sized explosive in her mouth. A stun grenade created intense light and noise, but it was almost entirely nonlethal. In some cases, there were accidental deaths when they detonated while in contact with someone, but that was when the fragments of the exterior case hit them. When using a metal case made for repeated uses, the lethality dropped even further.
It detonated inside the white liger’s mouth, but no light escaped. After it exploded like crackling gum, the liger spat out the remains. Aika’s pet, partner, and sofa slowly approached Kyousuke.
He turned tearfully around, but it was too late.

Before he took his third step, she grabbed the back of his hoodie in her mouth like he was a kitten.
“W-wait, liger!! Let’s make a deal. I’ll give you twenty kilograms of angus sirloin red meat, so can you please let me go!?”
As if to say “shut up, get over here, and do as you’re told”, the animal placed Kyousuke in the seat of honor at the dining table.
Then the time of his execution arrived.
In her swimsuit and apron, Aika placed a large plate of “it” in front of him.
That was enough for an unpleasant sweat and tears to well up on his face.
Aika sat across from him, placed her elbows on the table, rested her small chin on her clasped hands, and smiled.
She would not let him escape until he ate it.
“I made omurice today.”
“I can already smell something really raw from here.”
“It’s an egg dish, so of course it smells raw.”
“That you think that is enough reason to worry right there! There’s no way this can have a happy ending!!”
He struggled, but it was no use. The white liger growled behind him to demand he continue.
Kyousuke grabbed the silver spoon with a trembling hand as if he were picking up a handgun on the second or third round of Russian roulette. He squeezed his eyes shut, tensed his lips, and prayed to god, but when he opened his eyes, the yellow mass was still there. Perhaps a summoner who used the gods of legend as a stepping stool would not receive their blessings.
He made up his mind and touched the yellow surface. The film of cooked egg split apart with a sticky sound. Like the abdominal cavity bursting to let the organs spill out, the chicken rice inside came into view with a color halfway between red and flesh-colored. The steam and heat reached his face, so he felt like he was staring into a colorful ditch on a summer day.
It was sticky and slimy.
The bizarrely sticky sheen confused his sense of sight.
“The fluffiness is the key to making a good omurice. That’s why I only half-cooked it. Eheh.”
“A-are you serious? The raw smell is hitting me like an invisible wall.”
The stomach acid rose up his esophagus, but he just barely managed to force it back down. He had yet to take a single bite, yet he was dying for some water.
The ingredients had to be the same.
It couldn’t have anything in it that would kill him.
He tried telling himself that, but it was not working. He recalled the peaceful look on Lu Niang Lan’s face as she lay pale and unmoving on the floor. He seriously doubted it was happiness that had caused that. He had heard that a type of gas weapon would relax all the muscles of the body, so the corpses would look like they were smiling when rigor mortis set in.

Perfect Dragon had ended up like that. That Illegal woman could defeat the average summoner barehanded even within the Summoning Ceremony that allowed free use of all sorts of monsters, but even her steel body had not been enough to save her.
Escaping unscathed was not possible. He had to give up on that.
Would he cut off the leg trapped below the rubble or would he stay there and die?
He had to make that sort of warrior's decision.
"Two days…no, three. A short stay in the hospital might not be so bad!! Toryah!!"
If he hesitated, it would never end. And most likely, it would only grow more hellish if he let it grow cold. The spoon stabbed into the omurice with an indescribable sound and he felt the utensil tearing through something stringy. He forcibly suppressed the disorientation coming from his inner ear and brought the bite to his-

Oh, brother.
My, my. I didn't expect you so soon. Have you finally given up on the world of the living?

"Bh,
fwooooooooohhhh

“What…the hell!? Was this really an egg dish!? It tasted like licking the inside of a hungover old man’s stomach!!”
“That’s a little too poetic for me to understand.”
“There’s way too much ketchup in the chicken rice and it’s so salty I think it’s dangerous on a medical level rather than a culinary one!!”
“But if I don’t put that much in, I can’t get that beautiful blood red color.”
“And why is it all so gritty!? Is it sand? Or pebbles!?”
“Onii-chan.”
Aika cut him off and got to the heart of the issue.
“A little sister’s cooking can’t be delicious, can it? It’s perfect *because* it isn’t any good. The hopeless flavor is what makes it so charming.”
The boy heard the thin strands of his nerves snapping.
“I knew it!! I knew you had to know it was bad!! I can accept trying your best only for it to not work out, but purposefully making it bad is an insult to the ingredients!!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke roared just like the white liger.
Clear drops fell from Aika’s eyes.
And of course, this was nothing as cute as being sad that he had insulted her cooking. She was a skilled summoner known as Government Award 870, Hikikomori, and she worked as a top-class middleman who managed the distribution of jobs. She did not have a heart as soft as tofu.
“Onii-chan,” said the apron swimsuit girl. “You complain, but you noticed, didn’t you? You noticed how the world works, at least enough to *have your own view of what a little sister’s cooking should be*.”
“Wha-…?”
“I’m happy. I’m so very happy, Onii-chan. I was right… I was right to continue my shock therapy for so long!!”
“I never said anything about that being ‘a little sister’s’ cooking, so stop trying to force it in that direction!!”
“I’ve spent so long waiting for this moment!! Liger! Today is Onii-chan’s first little sister day, so we need to cook some red rice!!!!!!”
“What a pain. Oh, what a pain in the ass!! Everywhere I go is a dead end, so I have no idea where to go next!!”
He struggled, but it was no use.
Round two of the insane home cooking had begun.

Facts

- Aika can cook, but a little sister’s cooking must not be good.

- Her deadly skill defeated Lu Niang Lan, the dreaded Perfect Dragon, in just one bite.
- As soon as Kyousuke took a bite, he saw a hallucination of the White Queen, but it is unknown what that means.
- As a form of shock therapy, Aika really just wanted Kyousuke to give his personal view of a little sister’s cooking.
- She will apparently be cooking red rice today.
- In the end, it is still unknown what Shiroyama Kyousuke thinks about “a little sister’s” cooking.

Opening X-02: Midair Battle, Altitude 5000m

「待機時間の九〇秒で間に合ったようで何より」

「では、第二ラウンドを始めようか」

(Opening X-02 Open 05/22 03:00 Attention! Local time)

オープニングX-02

空中戦、高度は五千m

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“I’m glad we made it within the ninety second standby period.”
“Now, how about we get Round 2 started?”
(Opening X-02 Open 05/22 03:00 Attention! Local Time)
Midair Battle, Altitude 5000m

The local time was three in the morning on May 22.
A formation of several large Repliglass transport ships known as Whooper Swans were flying five thousand meters above the Pacific Ocean. With an escort of Repliglass aircraft known as Swallows, the heavily guarded group sliced through the dark night, so no one would mistakenly think they were filled with tourists enjoying a vacation.
As their name suggested, the Whooper Swans were designed after migratory birds, so they could takeoff from land or water, carry thirty tons of cargo, and fly 13,000 km without refueling. When used exclusively to transport personnel, they could carry two hundred soldiers to the other side of the planet. They also had a unique navigation system that accurately picked up their direction and location using the earth’s magnetic field, so they could avoid the foolish scenario of being shot down by a surface-to-air missile after a civilian app picked up their GPS signal or collision avoidance signal.
They were all primary products of Quad Motors, an American defense contractor.
Currently, the third Whooper Swan was filled with spiraling alarms that sounded like screams or angry shouts.
The internal lighting had switched over to the red lights that indicated an emergency.
“Escort Swallows #3 and #8 are down! The remaining four are being overpowered!!”
“There are twelve enemy aircraft. …No, there are some high-level stealth fighters mixed in! Their numbers are unknown!!”
“Angel 02 to Seraph 03. The numerical difference has grown too wide. We can’t hold them back any longer! They’re going to reach the main unit!!”
The crew was ignoring the proper manual by removing their seatbelts and running around in a panic, but one boy remained entirely motionless as he leaned against a bulkhead with his arms crossed.
He was Shiroyama Kyousuke.
He kept one eye closed and spoke to the master of this small fortress.
“Did you know this was going to happen? At least the Swallow pilots were able to eject safely…”
“Well, if I hadn’t, I wouldn’t have paid so much to hire a Freedom summoner.”
A gentle woman’s voice answered him. She went beyond calm and seemed to have left the flow of time behind.

She had long and fluffy chestnut-brown hair, thin-framed glasses, a tight skirt, and the kind of white blouse and bolo tie that went with a suit. That might make her sound like an office worker, but the lab coat she wore on top of that entirely changed that impression. But due to the aura surrounding her, she may have looked more like a school doctor than a cold scientist.
She was Government Award 109, Academia.
Her name was Maria Heartocean.
She was *a summoner who had surpassed Award 100 without fighting even once* and she participated in the Summoning Ceremony industry as a pure researcher, so in a way she was a mutation on the same level as Perfect Dragon Lu Niang Lan.
Maria elegantly relaxed in a folding chair with her legs crossed.
“That’s what it means when those of us in Government hire someone from Freedom, right? And didn’t you know the risks when you took the job?”
“That mysterious stomachache is turning out to be surprisingly expensive. Of course, part of that was due to relying on Lu-san’s Chinese medicine which is about as rare as a jewel…”
“?”
Maria tilted her head before continuing.
“So what do you think as a professional fighter? This ship is carrying a brain and some research results that could destroy the world’s balance, so do you think Illegal’s ‘cleaners’ will be satisfied just by giving me a watery grave?”
“What are you talking about…?”
It was not Kyousuke who interrupted.
It was a senior military officer with plenty of medals displayed on his chest and he spoke to prevent the boy from saying anything unnecessary.
“Let me be clear, lady. With our army, navy, air force, and marines, we have the world’s largest military and we can achieve victory no matter the situation. We are the world police! Thus we need no help from an outside mercenary!”
“Buuuut, you only have four…no, three Swallow escorts left, right? You don’t have the numbers or strength to push back Illegal’s force now. Alice (with) Rabbit, how long until the enemy reaches our main unit?”
“Less than three minutes.”
“You heard him. We only have what I think amounts to a king and two pawns on the chess board while Illegal has the full set. So how are you going to turn this around now?”
“Impossible… This can’t be possible…”
The commander groaned and finally started shouting at his closest subordinate to release the pressure building up in his heart.
“We’re only up against outdated fighters, so what in the hell is happening!? Our military has the highest Repliglass standards in the world! These are Quad Motors products!! We should be a generation and a half ahead of every other army!!”

“W-well…”
The young crewmember seemed on the verge of tears, but not because he did not know the answer. He knew answering would only throw oil on the fire.
Kyousuke sighed and took on the thankless role while leaning against the wall.
“They’re using old-fashioned fighters. Based on the movements I’ve seen on the radar, they’re probably Generation 6.5. I think it’s a combination of the Euro Guild’s manned Cold Waves and unmanned Blizzards.”
“Y-you have to be joking… We have cutting-edge Repliglass! In the mock battles, just one of these soundly defeated two hundred stealth fighters and avoided all fifty surface-to-air missiles. That outdated junk could never catch up to us. Besides, Europe admitted defeat in the technological race and decided to import our weapons!”
Maria shrugged in her folding chair and Kyousuke continued with a calm look on his face.
“But as long as they know you’re ‘only’ using Repliglass, they can put together a specialized method of shooting them down. The Whooper Swans and the Swallows both use the earth’s magnetic field to determine their direction and location just like migratory birds and they use that data for evasive actions. …If Illegal uses magnetic jamming, don’t you think your avoidance rates will drop like a rock?”
“Wha-…?”
“It’s often said that numbers from mock battles are useless in actual battle,” said Maria. “Well, this is generally how it works when you try to make the ultimate almighty legend that can do everything on its own. I mean, we’re not talking about something that surpasses human understanding like the White Queen.”
Her point was a very summoner-like thing to say, but that name of great evil sent slight ripples through Kyousuke’s heart. He made a point of calming himself before saying more.
“These things have silicon armor and muscles and they have extraordinary shock absorption rates thanks to their structure, but that just means they can be effectively damaged with the kind of chemical rounds that corrode glass. And luckily for our enemy, the Cold Wave and Blizzard are mysterious aircraft that fought against and lost to the Repliglass in the development race. Doesn’t it seem likely they developed plenty of options for defeating Repliglass to help advertise their technology?”
Kyousuke stopped for a moment there.
He looked to Maria for permission before continuing.
“Now, I apologize for getting a little off topic here, but…”
“What is it?”
“Europe has a tendency to insist on developing unique weapons. Even if that means sharing technology with the other European nations when their own can’t do it alone. That’s exactly why the Euro Guild was formed. But

they ultimately found they couldn’t stand up to the Repliglass of America’s Quad Motors and reluctantly agreed to import those weapons. …Of course, the Magentarain family isn’t purely American and are actually an extremely influential lobbying group sent in from Europe, so that may have helped soothe their wounded pride.”
“S-so what? We don’t have time to chitchat right now!!”
“What do you think happened to the Cold Wave and Blizzard production lines after they lost the development race without ever once being used? To put it another way, where did Illegal buy these from? …The rumors I’ve heard say a portion of the US military took on part of the Euro Guild’s debt so such a major client wouldn’t go bankrupt. I believe the official reports said you were taking in ‘external DNA’ to promote diversity of weapons, but was that the real reason? I’d like to hear what *someone very familiar with this topic* has to say.”
First, Shiroyama Kyousuke stared at him.
Maria also looked curiously at him and then the young crewmembers all focused on him as they rushed about.
They all focused on the senior military officer with the mountain of medals on his chest who had been so angry earlier.
“How does it feel to be tormented by fighters built using the very production line you sold? Since their tech was a generation behind, did you think America would be nice and safe protected by its cutting-edge Repliglass even if some bad guys were menacing the rest of the world?”
“…”
At first, the officer forgot all about the passing time and stood there with a blank look on his face.
But as soon as he realized what Kyousuke had meant and recalled his current situation, he tried to swiftly pull his side arm from its holster.
But before he could, the young crewmembers rushed at him from all around.
Maria did not even watch as the officer was pinned to the floor.
“This isn’t good…”
“This hasn’t solved anything. As I said, I was getting off topic.”
“Then let’s get back on topic. Do you think Illegal will rejoice if they give me a watery grave since I can destroy the world’s balance?”
“No. No assassin fails to check the corpse and they’ll want your tech if they can get it, so I doubt they’ll send you crashing into the dark sea late at night. If you were wearing a Water Bear specialized for life support, you could survive in the ocean for over a month in a state of suspended animation.”
“Meaning…”
“They’re going to board us.”
They made it sound so simple, but it surprised one of the young crewmembers holding down his officer.

“Impossible… Even if transport ships are relatively slow, we’re five thousand meters up and moving at seven hundred kph. And it’s not like the cargo door will open if they politely knock. How could they board us under those condi-…”
“Unfortunately, they can do it. If, that is, they use a summoner who can ignore the normal assumptions,” readily stated Kyousuke. “Five thousand meters is above the clouds. It would be best to hide the Whooper Swan in the clouds. *We need to avoid being seen by the naked eye.*”
The young crewmember was clearly confused but did as he was told because Government was in charge here, not America. Luckily, he kept his eyes on Kyousuke – and thus kept the summoner in his field of vision – as he used the intercom to contact the cockpit.
Meanwhile, Maria spoke calmly.
“Buuuuut. Running isn’t enough. In fact, I doubt we can get away.”
“…”
“So if Illegal is sending a summoner to board us, I’d like to have Government send out a summoner to intercept them.”
With that comment, a single footstep sounded oddly clearly through the din of noise.
It was a short, white-skinned, small-chested girl with bright blonde hair cut short. She wore a red hat and an identically-colored military uniform with a tight skirt. The black belts placed all over the uniform allowed it to double as a straightjacket. On her feet, she wore knee-high boots which also had belts wrapped around them. But in the world of the Summoning Ceremony, restraints such as handcuffs and blindfolds had a special meaning.
They were the symbol of the vessel who formed a pair with a summoner. They had to bind their own mind so they were not possessed by vengeful and evil spirits they had not summoned.
In other words…
“This is Isabelle, a Government vessel. She’s free right now, so she can become one half of Alice (with) Rabbit at any time.”
“…You knew this was going to happen from the beginning, didn’t you? You lured Illegal in here to create a situation where I would bind a contract with her.”
“Oh? This is a brand-name vessel built up by Government, the world police made up of about sixty governments, corporations, religions, and other groups. I can’t see any room for complaint there.”
Kyousuke sighed.
Either way, they would all die if the Whooper Swan was boarded. Unlike the combat Swallows, this aircraft had no ejection device. In addition to the summoners and vessel who were soaked in the world of the Summoning Ceremony, there were plenty of ignorant normal soldiers who had been sent out too. And most importantly, Kyousuke had the title of Alice (with) Rabbit.
He looked to the military uniform girl while still leaning against the bulkhead.

“You heard her. Are you ready?”
“Yes. I’m willing to fight, but I’d like an injection of motivation.”
“?”
“Specifically, I want a tangible reward. Something other than ‘let’s all work together’.”
Kyousuke gave Maria a dead-eyed look, but the woman simply shrugged in her folding chair. She seemed to be saying that was the kind of girl this was.
“What about a Daioh Bowl at the Dengeki Restaurant?”
“I prefer the Moe Meal.”
“The Maoh Combo?”
“The G’s Lunch.”
“The Hobby Set is the most I can do.”
“Hmm.”
Kyousuke and Isabelle pointed at each other’s face and spoke at the exact same moment.
“Here we go.”
“Here we go.”
The boy left the bulkhead, the girl walked to his side, and they both moved to the very back of the Whooper Swan.

“I bind this covenant of blood in the name of The Spirit of Fluttering ‘Yellow’ Gills that Rules the Heavens (s – a – so – voz – tix – ei – yw – za), one of the Three which manage and guide the summoning ceremony. You are of human flesh with a proper heart and soul, yet from this moment onward, you shall be a limited vessel that can hold all things.”
Kyousuke almost sang the whispered words as he cut his index finger with a razor blade.
“You shall be a lord of emptiness that uses the power filling you to at times bend the laws of this world.”
A bead of red blood appeared on the end of his finger and he held it out toward Isabelle.
“So I shall prepare this vessel. I am a summoner, unable to leave the world of man, yet a symbol of haughty intellect that uses power from beyond the world of man to guide the world of man to the next age!!”
Isabelle used her small tongue to expressionlessly lick up the iron-tasting liquid.
That signaled the completion of their contract.
Shiroyama Kyousuke pulled out a 180 cm rod that had been curled up in the back of his hoodie. It was a Blood-Sign, one tool of the Summoning Ceremony.
The two of them arrived at the very back of the Whooper Swan.
Kyousuke used his own voice to speak to a soldier who wore a special mask to work in an extreme low pressure environment. Unless he gathered their attention, the summoner and vessel would be forgotten.
“Can you close the first barrier and open the cargo door?”
“Eh!? What!? But we’re five thousand meters up. What are you thinking of doing without a suit or mask!?”
“Just do it. We only have twenty seconds.”

The Euro Guild’s Generation 6.5 fighters came in two varieties: the manned Cold Wave and the unmanned Blizzard.
They were a unique weapon that stuck to a structure of one manned command craft per three to four unmanned high-mobility fighters, so the Blizzards may have been more like the secondary ships in a shooting game than like any previously-existing weapon.
They pursued the enemy craft with sharp turns that exceeded the human limits of inertial Gs and the manned fighter always remained close at hand to prevent interference from cyber-attacks and jamming, so they provided certain attack power and overall safety.
“Bam, bam, bam! That magnetic jamming is working like a charm. The turkey’s stripped bare, so we can go at any time!!”
“Come in from the front just to be sure. I want to *see the pilot’s face from the cockpit*. That would be the most effective method. …Aiko, get ready.”

Their top priority objective was not shooting down Government's Repliglass Whooper Swan.
It was securing a certain research result as well as the scientist behind it. If that proved impossible, they would shoot it down. In other words, that was their secondary objective.
"Anyway, this is completely insane. Government has finally started messing with people's souls."
"It's technically spiritual damage and not the soul itself. They find the soul's impurities and either wash them away or use them. Not even they have a definition of the soul itself."
"It's the same either way. They can *possess* and *corrupt* people all they want, right? By now, they're probably developing a new breed of human with wings on their back."
As she listened to that exchange, the Cold Wave's female pilot stroked the revolver-style grenade launcher attached above her lap.
It fired Incense Grenades.
And if she had those, then the pilot was also a summoner.
An Artificial Sacred Ground was set up when a summoner saw their target with the naked eye and threw an Incense Grenade. And the Artificial Sacred Ground could attach to any surface: the wall, the ceiling, a high-speed train, or even an airplane's wing.
The pilot was known as Illegal Award 701, Sky Brain.
A lot of summoners preferred highly idiosyncratic localized battles or unique strategies, and she was one of those. She was a rare example of *a summoner who specialized in midair battles.*
Her feminine curves were clearly visible even through her anti-G suit.
Instead of using the radio, she spoke to the sub seat behind her without looking back.
"Aiko, are you ready?"
"Y-yes. When you are."
The next action occurred during that exchange.
The target group of Whooper Swans rapidly lowered their noses and began to enter the thick clouds.
"Dammit! They're diving down!! We won't be able to see them with the naked eye!!"
"#1 and #4 were lost. But we still have the all-important #3!! Keep on that one at least!!"
"Its head is already in the clouds, so I can't see the cockpit!!"
She switched off the radio to avoid listening to that pointless exchange.
The vessel girl spoke behind her.
"Can we make it?"
"You bet."
As previously stated, an Artificial Sacred Ground was only established if the Incense Grenade was thrown while the summoner could see their target with the naked eye.

The problem there was how “the target” was defined.
Did it work when they were just standing there? What if they were wearing a mask? What if they had a character costume covering their entire body? What if they were inside a tank or warship?
No definite answer had been found, but based on Sky Brain’s experience, she felt it had to do with the ability to accurately picture the target in one’s mind. If the target was entirely covered by a character costume, the Artificial Sacred Ground would still appear as long as the summoner could accurately picture the person inside it. It was the same with a tank or a warship. But no matter how accurately one pictured the designs and knew the position of the seat, it would fail if there was not actually anyone sitting there.
On the other hand, a hallway corner or a single layer of paper was enough to prevent it as long as the summoner could not picture the person’s position on the other side. Formless things like powerful backlighting or thick clouds were not much fun for summoners.
That was why she had to finish them off before they could hide.
It did not matter whether or not she could directly see the pilot’s face through the cockpit’s reinforced glass canopy. She only had to see the whole of the #3 Whooper Swan so she could know the position of the cockpit and the pilot’s seat like the back of her own hand.
She pulled the ejection lever located between her legs.
“Let’s go, Aiko!!”
Sky Brain knew she would never receive an answer if she asked if they could go, so she pulled the lever without waiting for a response.
The outer framework of the reinforced glass canopy was severed with the power of gunpowder. The wind pressure blew it backwards and the front and back seats were ejected vertically.
Even after being thrown into the empty air, Sky Brain accurately aimed her revolver-style grenade launcher in one hand. She targeted the #3 Whooper Swan that was trying to escape into the clouds. She was closer now. If she accurately saw them and fired the Incense Grenade, she and the girl would be guided to their target because the summoner and vessel were dragged to the center of the Artificial Sacred Ground when the Incense Grenade detonated.
But just before she could, the Whooper Swan’s rear cargo door opened wide. It transformed into a gentle slope and a boy and girl stood on it. Also, something was thrown out from it. A hairspray-sized metal can cut horizontally through the night sky thanks to the violent winds. It stabbed into the fighter that had been abandoned to the sky after losing its pilot.
It was an Incense Grenade.
“Oh, shi-…”
The sound of the explosion filled that space.
She did not have time to curse or to warn her vessel partner.

Shiroyama Kyousuke and Isabelle jumped out into the night sky at an altitude of five thousand meters without the protection of an oxygen tank or pressure-resistant suit. If they were mountain climbing this high without acclimating themselves to the altitude, the risk of altitude sickness would rise considerably.
Their vision wavered, their head hurt, and their chest felt tight, but they ignored it all as they flew horizontally through the night sky. The boy and girl seemed to be magnetically attracted to the main wing of the fighter with an open canopy and they firmly planted their feet on it.
Kyousuke knew that any risk to his life would be resolved as long as he accomplished one thing.
“Stay focused!! This will all be for nothing if you pass out before we summon a Material!!”
“Right. And I would be in super-sized trouble if the summoner lost consciousness. I’d fall from here.”
He used his Blood-Sign to launch a glowing white ball known as a White Thorn.
A collection of 6 x 6 x 6 red balls of light for a total of 216 floated above the Artificial Sacred Ground’s reference surface while matching that surface’s speed. When the White Thorn struck that Rose, the Rose broke into many Petals. Those were low, middle, high, and lowest sounds. As those red lights scattered, he hit one of them into a Spot, a dark fist-sized hole opened in space itself.
At the same time, a protective circle surrounded Shiroyama Kyousuke to keep any external and internal factors from harming him.
Isabelle’s entire body transformed into a three meter mass of translucent red goo known as the Original Red (b).
All of the pain afflicting Kyousuke vanished in an instant.
The battle was also settled in the blink of an eye.
“Kh!!”
The enemy summoner and vessel were hit by the massive wind pressure and could no longer stand on the ground (that is, on the fighter). They were blown backwards and placed their feet on the transparent wall of the Artificial Sacred Ground.
The summoner woman threw away her revolver-style grenade launcher and produced a unique Blood-Sign by gathering moisture until it spiraled around like a whirlpool. It was indeed praiseworthy that she had the swift strength to launch a White Thorn from there.
But it was too late. She would not make it in time.
Before the transformation could affect her vessel, Isabelle’s slime twisted into a drill-like point and charged forward. She collided with the vessel who was still a girl and mercilessly sank into the girl’s solar plexus. With a dull sound of impact, the girl was knocked out.

A vessel could not function while unconscious.
And since the summoner had already launched a White Thorn and was thus contained within a protective circle, they would still receive the penalty for losing.
As soon as both the summoner and vessel went limp, they slipped through the wall at the edge of the Artificial Sacred Ground. They were no longer a target of battle and had been fully neutralized, so they were no longer obstructed by that wall. They were swallowed up by the roaring wind and they vanished into the darkness. Kyousuke started to follow them with his eyes, but…
<Not to worry. Their parachutes will automatically open at a set altitude. Fwoosh(deadpan)>
“Right. Let’s hurry on.”
As soon as he said that, Isabelle realized what he meant and used her translucent slime body to smash the fighter below their feet like it was a candy box.
An Artificial Sacred Ground had a reference surface and, if it was destroyed, the next surface stepped on by the summoner who had setup the Artificial Sacred Ground became the next reference surface.
Free of that surface, the summoner and Material flew through the dark sky. Once their footing and the artificial gravity were gone, the fierce winds washed over them and the intense wind pressure swept them backwards. All of this was part of the plan. They flew through the sky to reach their second footing.
At times, they would stand on the main wing of an unmanned high-mobility Blizzard and break that wing to jump to the next aircraft. At other times, they would stand on the bottom of a manned Cold Wave’s nose and tear apart the fighter like a paper box before the summoner and vessel could show themselves. The hard part was the inability to use a purely unmanned craft as a target for setting up a new Artificial Sacred Ground, but as long as they knew that from the beginning, it was easy enough to use. Either way, they were immortal as long as the Chain lasted and the protective circle remained.
They hopped from one to another.
They rode the wind from branch to branch.
As they alternated between landing and leaping, they destroyed each of the fighters as they jumped away from it.
A Material that could change based on sound range and cost was effective here. By freely changing its shape, he could switch to the ideal option for the aerodynamics, lift, and air resistance they needed.
Kyousuke was always inside the unchanging protective circle, but he could receive some benefit by staying right next to the Material. And sticking out the tip of his Blood-Sign would spin his body around.

The ninety-second Chain state would reset when a new human target was taken into the Artificial Sacred Ground. Using that like a time bonus, they alternated between destroying manned and unmanned aircraft.
It took no time at all.
The frontline summoner reduced those steel birds of death to nothing more than fireworks in the night sky.
And…
They came to the final one.
“E-eek!?”
Atop the Cold Wave, Shiroyama Kyousuke turned his robotic eyes down toward his feet. He could see the pilots looking up at him through the reinforced glass canopy and they showed no intention of coming out.
They worked to swing the aircraft around, but it was a waste of time. No matter what happened, the summoner and vessel could not be thrown from the Artificial Sacred Ground’s reference surface. The fact that they had forgotten such a basic fact showed just how blank their minds had grown.
“Hurry on out and summon something. If we take you out in a single blow, you can escape with your parachutes.”
Kyousuke tapped the canopy with his Blood-Sign and let them read his lips.
“During battle, the vessel can’t fully suppress the Material’s violent nature. If you don’t make up your mind before the first attack is thrown, you’ll have to take the hit as normal humans.”
Kyousuke kept his promise.
The summoner and vessel pair had completely lost the will to fight, so it took less than five seconds to defeat them. Then he asked his vessel a question from the nose of the now-empty fighter.
“How much can you restrain the Material!?”
<During the Chain right now, about 100%. I’ve got a super-sized level of control.>
“Then keep it up. We’ve got another job to do!!”
<I’d like more of an explanation. Hanyaaan (deadpan)???>
“We’re going to attack their aircraft carrier before more can take flight.”
The reinforced glass canopy had opened for the emergency ejection, so the cockpit was exposed. However, Kyousuke did not bother grabbing the control stick. He lightly jumped from the nose to the main wing and pushed on the end of the wing with his Blood-Sign. He was pushing on the flap that changed the flow of air to redirect the aircraft. He then pushed down with all his weight.
The fighter began a large turn with Kyousuke and Isabelle seemingly magnetically stuck to its surface.

The term aircraft carrier brings to mind a large-scale collection of military secrets that only the most powerful of nations can produce, but that was not the case here.

The main point was whether or not it contained cutting-edge catapults, but that meant it was relatively easy to build an aircraft carrier that did not use steam, linear, or other technology for short takeoff catapults.
For example, it could be an aircraft carrier that used a sloped jump similar to a ski jump.
This Illegal faction had bought (using falsified paperwork) a rundown tanker set to be scrapped and attached the sloped jump.
The command system and early warning radar were outdated and it had no fleet for protection, but it was more than enough for a criminal group to freely send out double digit numbers of Generation 6.5 fighters.
But then a fighter crashed right into it.
In a line of explosive flames that resembled an orange flood, the sloped jump was smashed to pieces.
At first, they likely thought one of their own had crashed.
The crew likely clicked their tongues and ran out to extinguish the fire and save the pilots.
But before long, they gasped.
They were already in a summoner's realm.
"I'm glad we made it within the ninety second standby period."
The youths had unwittingly rushed into the Artificial Sacred Ground, so they were trapped within the Chain, giving the enemy a further ten minutes. The boy standing in the crimson flames rested his Blood-Sign on his shoulder as he spoke.
"Now, how about we get Round 2 started?"
A human-formed disaster had fallen like a meteor.
That violence reached the normal soldiers as well as the Illegal summoners and did not end until the aircraft carrier disguised as a tanker had been torn in two.

Facts

- People have no definition for the human soul. However, research is underway on the impurities stuck to the soul which are known as spiritual damage. It is thought this holds the possibility of reaching the human soul itself.
- When the Incense Grenade is thrown, the summoner must have a view of the target with the naked eye. However, if they can accurately picture the internal structure and the person is actually there, the person can be defined as a target even inside fully

sealed armor or a giant weapon. But their presence can only be confirmed by seeing if the Artificial Sacred Ground actually appears, so it is safer and more certain to observe the person themselves.

- If the Artificial Sacred Ground's reference surface is moving, such as on a train or airplane, the Rose, Petals, Spots, etc. will automatically match its speed. When the vehicle turns, the people fighting turn with it. In that case, the White Thorns and Petals are not thrown around by the movement and turning, so the battle can continue like normal.
- A Chain can be used for a long-term midair battle.
- If the vessel is defeated after a Petal enters the Spot but before their body transforms, the summoner and vessel still receive the penalty for defeat.
- When the Artificial Sacred Ground is established, the enemy is trapped inside it. But once they are defeated, the unconscious people are no longer considered targets and can slip through the walls.
- The Spots and Rose do not exist during a Chain, so the Material remains but cannot be built up further. It can only be built up when an enemy is present.

Stage 01: A Transfer Student in Early Spring Signals the Collapse of the School

「ねえねえ、これはどこに捨てれば良いの?」

「聞いた話では『ガバメント』が欲しがっているようだから、

愛歌辺りと連絡を取ろう」

(Stage 01 Open 05/23 07:30)

ステージ01

春先の転校生は学園崩壊の足音

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Hey, hey. Where are we supposed to dump this?”
“It sounds like Government is interested, so let’s contact Aika.”
(Stage 01 Open 05/23 07:30)
A Transfer Student in Early Spring Signals the Collapse of the School

Part 1

A jetlagged mind made it hard to get up in the morning.
In the cabin space of the cruiser he lived in, Shiroyama Kyousuke rubbed his eyes on the double bed as the alarm clock’s ringing assaulted his senses.
He got back at it by hitting the switch of the bedside alarm clock.
And for some reason, the vessel named Isabelle had slipped onto the double bed while wearing black cat pajamas.
“…”
Kyousuke tried to get his sleep-addled brain working, but he ran out of strength and gave into the urge to fall back asleep.
He heard a girl’s voice from below the covers.
“I put my body on the line for the best setup I could manage, so I’m disappointed you aren’t going along with it. Zuuun (deadpan).”
“?”
What was this?
Why could he hear something below the covers?
To figure out what this was, his foggy mind led him to reach out and touch it…but what was it? It was soft and warm…so what in the world was it? A steamed bun? It seemed a little too small for that.
“And when you just start groping me, I’m small-sized unsure how to respond.”
His mind finally caught up to reality.
He was reminded of a shameful summer morning long, long ago before he had become Alice (with) Rabbit. That morning, he had wet the bed. At first, he had refused to believe it, but he had been unable to ignore the strange sensation. Just like back then, he hesitantly peered below the covers and the experienced summoner screamed just like his past self.
“Waaaa

“Wh-wh-wh-wh-wh-why-why are you here!?”
The crawling black cat pajamas reigned supreme as the only one left on the double bed.
“Nya nyaaan (deadpan). I haven’t gotten my reward for that midair battle.”
“What?”
“I believe we settled on a Dengeki Restaurant Hobby Set.”
“I thought we parted ways for the night at A Block’s international airport. And why!? Actually, how did you even get inside the cruiser? Did you pick the lock? Did you melt it? Or did you use a power drill? I won’t get mad, so be honest with me!!”
The girl who had fallen into a feline mentality gave him a displeased look from the bed.
“I need to give you a super-sized punishment for breaking our contract.”
“Except now you’re breaking the law! Just because normal people forget all about summoners and vessels is no reason to stop following society’s rules! And if you broke the lock to break in, I’ll have to get a new one, so just tell me!”
“So it’s time for a super-sized attack using the cheetah style! Whoosh (deadpan).”
“!? Why are you leaping at me when I’m the angry one here!?”
The black cat pajamas used her lithe, muscular body and the bed springs to launch herself with great force. Kyousuke was helpless as they started rolling around together on the cabin floor.
As the young girl mounted him at full force, Kyousuke lay on his back, covered his face with his hands, and sobbed.
“I don’t even care anymore, so can you just get off of me…?”
“Only if I get my reward. No further orders will be accepted until then.”
Isabelle started bouncing her hips up and down to hurry Kyousuke along. The behavior might have looked seductive if the blows had not been hitting him in the solar plexus, making it even more painful than the boxer training in which a large ball was dropped on the stomach.
“Hurry, hurry. Hobby Set. I want a Dengeki Restaurant Hobby Set.”
“Gh, gbh!! I-I can’t exactly do anything unless you get off of me first!!”
The black cat pajamas stopped moving up and down and tilted her head instead.
“Hmm. The task will never be complete without the reward, but I can’t receive the reward without agreeing to a new task…”
A dull spiraling light appeared deep in her eyes.
“Ghhh (deadpan). Oh, no. I don’t understand even a small-sized bit of this anymore.”
“Oh!? Why would that make you strangle me!?”
He put up a struggle and finally managed to push Isabelle off of him.
It took her more than thirty seconds to cool down.
“I-I want my Dengeki Restaurant Hobby Set…”
“Fine, fine. Wait, are they even open in the mornings?”

It did not look like he would be given time for a shower, so he stuck to the bare minimum of washing his face and then changed into his school uniform in the shower space. He had school today. He lived a double life, but he wanted to do “as much as possible” to avoid neglecting either one.
Isabelle used his time out of the cabin space to change into her red military uniform. She must have gotten bored waiting for Kyousuke because she had grabbed the TV remote and started watching a morning information show.
“Let’s get rid of those May blues by having a second Halloween in early summer! The witch’s night comes late to Toy Dream 35! The Delayed Walpurgis campaign has begun. We actively recommend you all wear costumes and anyone in costume will receive a variety of benefits while the campaign lasts.”
“C’mon, let’s go. Your Hobby Set is waiting for you, right?”
“Right. The Juddark toy is waiting for me!”
They left the cruiser together.
Toy Dream 35 was the result of a foreign entertainment company buying up a bankrupt Japanese city and converting it into a giant amusement park. Most of it was a collection of super high-rise buildings built over the ocean and they were connected by layer after layer of giant bridges in a spider web-like arrangement.
Kyousuke’s cruiser was in the harbor that bordered the ocean on the lowest level of the city. The first floor (that is, around the waterline) of the giant rectangular buildings generally had cruisers and boats moored around them.
There was a small path that may have been a protruding part of the building or buffering material to protect against collisions from the cruisers, but walking along that was a good way to slip and fall, so they jumped from ship to ship to reach the stairway up, just like he always did.
After a bit of climbing the emergency staircase that zigzagged up the building’s wall, they finally reached one of the giant bridges. There, they could enter the crowds. Perhaps due to the costume campaign mentioned on TV, the crowd was filled with people dressed as witches or Little Red Riding Hood.
“Happy Walpurgis!!”
“C’mon, hand over the donut! Otherwise, this’ll be a one coin donation!!”
“Gozaru, gozaru. The Gozaru Samurai has transformed into a gargoyle!”
The place was packed with dragonfly-winged fairies, gray costume characters, and more. Even costume weapons must have been banned because a police officer was scolding a samurai and a kunoichi.
“Faster, faster. Hurry, hurry.”
“Breakfast isn’t going anywhere.”
“Juddark is really popular and I don’t want him to sell out. We need to super-size it! Make a super-sized dash!”
“Hm? Juddark?”

The giant bridge was packed full of office workers in suits, students in a variety of uniforms, and a costumed group of foreign tourists who had decided to get an early start. It was easy to forget the bridge was as wide as a road with three lanes in either direction.
They followed the crowd of giant pumpkin costumes and sexy bunny girls and then took a turn into a building.
Burgers, frankfurters, barbecue, beef steaks, and sodas. As a foreign-owned amusement park, Toy Dream 35's restaurants served a lot of American junk food, but the Dengeki Restaurant was known to some for being even more chaotic. While most domestic chains were in decline, this one had made a push overseas and actually seen some success. If anything, it could be classified as a family restaurant. With bowls, plates, meals, combos, and lunches, the menu was something of a mess, but that careless obsessiveness was very much like a Japanese chain restaurant.
It was fairly busy, so they could not get a table seat. They were guided to a counter seat where they sat side by side.
"Whoosh(deadpan). Waitress, I want a Hobby Set! I know it comes with a Juddark toy!!"
Kyousuke still had no idea what a Juddark was and it made him think of some kind of chocolate, but then he saw some information on the corner of the menu.
"It's the dark mascot hero Juddark! His dark judgments will slay evil!!"
He did not know the details, but it was apparently a bipedal black cat with a mean look in its eyes. The somewhat large-headed cat had a wire in its hands(?).
Something like that could become a strategic international product with annual revenue exceeding 500 billion, so the Toy Dream amusement park cities really were unique. A character could be as valuable as an oil field.
"Why do you want that so bad? Isn't it just a kid's meal that adults know their kid will like because it comes with a little toy?"
"What it is doesn't matter."
"?"
"It's super-sized important that we close out the task by proving the contract was fulfilled."
Kyousuke despaired when he did not find cereal and milk on the breakfast menu and settled on ordering an eggs benedict, seafood salad, and iced coffee set.
While waiting for their order, Isabelle swayed her small body back and forth and spoke.
"What are we going to do after this?"
"Oh, you mean about *that*? Yesterday's midair battle was unexpected, but it doesn't really change what we need to do. Let's just do the job we were given."
"Then you should have made the contract from the very beginning."

“If we could have settled this without a contract, that wouldn’t have been necessary, right?”
That was when someone’s hand interrupted them. Kyousuke looked over, thinking it might be the waitress, but it was another customer. It was Rendou Akiya, a classmate of Kyousuke’s who at first looked like a girl with semi-long brown hair but was actually a boy who liked to wear a girl’s blazer and pleated skirt.
But today, he was wearing something else. As part of the Delayed Walpurgis, he was wearing a three-pointed witch’s hat and a cape.
And the boy looked like he had only noticed Kyousuke’s presence after sitting down next to him.
“Oh. What are you doing eating out, Shiroyama-chan? I thought you subsisted on supermarket meals.”
“I have my reasons.”
“What, did your fridge or microwave break?”
“More importantly, what’s with that getup?”
“Oh, this?”
His classmate spread his arms to show off the miniskirt costume.
“I had trouble deciding between a witch and a fairy. During the campaign, you get a discount if you shop in costume. I think you get 15% off at this family restaurant. And isn’t that military uniform girl in costume?”
“That isn’t a costume. And don’t we have school after this?”
“You silly puppy. I can’t understand why anyone would wear their uniform all day long. Doesn’t make any sense.”
The miniskirt witch boy ordered a Japanese-style breakfast based on tamago-kake gohan.
“By the way, have you heard about the transfer student?”
“That’s news to me,” answered Kyousuke.
“Unfortunately, it’s a guy. I guess we won’t be getting the triple sevens of a beautiful, mysterious, and virgin.”
As you can see, Rendou only chose women’s clothing as a fashion statement and he was not a true “trap”.
Witch Rendou waved sociably at the waitress who brought him his tamago-kake gohan set. As Kyousuke watched, he frowned in realization.
Rendou had ordered after him, but his food had arrived first. Which meant…
“Oh, this isn’t good…”
“What is it?”
“I need to step into the kitchen a moment.”
“What is it, Shiroyama-chan!? Are you the kind of person who likes to call out the chef?”
Kyousuke ignored the frantic shout and stepped through the staff only door with Isabelle following him.
At first, the cooks looked surprised, but…
“Hm? Huh…? Oh, that’s right! I forgot your order!!”
“As long as you’ve remembered.”

People forgot that summoners and vessels existed as soon as they left their field of vision. Even if there was a mechanical order slip, it was all over if they mistook it for an erroneous input.
“U-um, uh, this will not happen again, so you can return to your seat…”
“Sorry, but I have a fairly serious food allergy, so could I watch you cook it?”
“Nuuun (deadpan). It would be a super-sized problem if you forgot my Hobby Set.”
Even ordering food at a restaurant was difficult.
It was easier at a school cafeteria where the kitchen was visible from the counter.
Once they returned to their seats with the completed food, the waitresses had “forgotten” about them and other customers’ butts were filling their seats.
“…”
“…”
Pressing their foreheads against a nearby wall in sorrow was their only option.

Part 2

After eating on their feet, Kyousuke parted ways with Isabelle once more.
“Can you kill some time until school’s out?”
“I will be super-sized okay. If I need to, I can break a window. Smash, smash(deadpan).”
“Just this once, you can pick the lock if you want, but don’t break anything.”
Kyousuke continued alone to a high school on a square portion of R Block.
Once he entered the classroom, his classmate Librarian-chan noticed him.
Once in school, everyone was wearing uniforms, so there weren’t any wolfmen or Frankensteins walking around.
“Good morning, Shiroyama-kun.”
“Morning. Aren’t you here pretty early today, Librarian-chan?”
“My name, my name.”
She had been caught in the middle of some summoner battles concerning a ghost known as the Rainy Girl, but that entire incident had ultimately been made so it “never happened” and she had no memory of it.
“Are you doing that Delayed Walpurgis thing, Librarian-chan?”
“Gh!? How did you hear I was stuck as a cat ears girl...no, a cat leotard girl for a costume event at work!?”

“Um, Librarian-chan…?”
“Geh! I shouldn’t have said that!! Just to be clear, this is a wholesome job! There isn’t anything untoward about it! It’s just a delivery service!!”
Librarian-chan blushed and tried to explain away some sort of misunderstanding, but Kyousuke was unsure how to react when that misunderstanding only existed in her mind.
And apparently she was still a part-timer girl even after “that incident” was changed.
After calming down some, she changed the subject.
“To ho ho. That’s just the uniform for the job and it doesn’t match my tastes at all. Maybe it’s just an issue of rose-colored glasses, but I had an awful time with a job yesterday too.”
“What was it? Sexual harassment?”
“In a way, it was worse!!”
Her blood pressure seemed to rise as the memory worked up her anger.
“I was working as an eco-friendly bicycle delivery service, but sometimes you get asked to make mysterious deliveries of pets people are sick of or memorial tablets! And they don’t care where it goes, so it’s up to you to figure something out! And you’re not allowed to complain or refuse!!”
“Yeah, I’ve heard scammers will get people to pay them using a bike delivery service instead of an ATM.”
“But the most common one lately is Girl’s Backdoor. It’s just what it sounds like: a product that lets you bend teenage girls to your will! And they’re selling for huge amounts on online auctions, so they’re being sent out for delivery all over the place! Apparently the rumors started right here in Toy Dream 35. I don’t know what it’s all about, but I ended up having the police stop me and bring me in for questioning. Can you believe that!? ‘Hey, you there. I doubt you are, but you aren’t being paid to assist in an auction scam, are you?’ God, it pisses me off!!”
“What exactly is it? Do you plug it into their temple to rewrite their brain?”
“Don’t ask me. And who would actually believe something like that? The actual product isn’t the problem; it’s how they’re using the rumors to make a ton of money off of the auctions. It doesn’t matter if it’s a cardboard card, hairspray with the label peeled off, or a plastic pendulum.”
As she spoke, Librarian-chan held out her smartphone for him to see.
An online auction page did indeed show quite a few entries for something called Girl’s Backdoor. She scrolled down the list, but there was no end in sight.
The example photos showed a great variety of “forms”: everything from strange old tomes to something like a homemade laser gun. It was definitely a movement, but Librarian-chan may have been right that it was more about using the name to sell junk at a high price than about the Girl’s Backdoor itself.

“That’s pretty incredible. All the numbers are up in the thirty or forty thousands. Even if you take into account these are auctions, it’s quite something.”
“I know, right? What I can’t believe is there are this many people out there who secretly want to bend girls to their will! That feels like enough of a threat on its own!!”
“But don’t the back covers of magazines have ads for lucky necklaces and bracelets with phony-sounding stories about how it made someone popular with girls? The demographic for those has just moved onto the auctions, so I bet the total numbers aren’t that much different.”
“That’s like telling someone not to worry because there have always been that many roaches behind your dresser and you just never noticed. It doesn’t help at all! It just creeps you out!!”
Kyousuke began to wonder if there were similar “lucky” products that supposedly made girls popular with boys. He did not have a habit of checking manga or fashion magazines for girls, so he did not know what was advertised in them.
That was when Rendou Akiya entered the classroom. He must have changed since leaving the family restaurant because he wore a girl’s uniform instead of a witch costume.
“Morning, everyone! Huh? Weren’t you with me earlier, Shiroyama-chan?”
“We must have gotten separated in the crowd.”
“More importantly!!” cut in Librarian-chan. “You! You were making money selling five or six of those Girl’s Backdoor products through online auctions, weren’t you!? Why do you have to make people like us work up a sweat running around town just so you can make some dirty money!?”
“Don’t be silly. Those are just joke products! It’s not like I’m taking advantage of the commotion to trick people!! The description of its effects is just a personal opinion!!”
“Grr, grr!”
“B-besides, if those stupid guys send me all their money, they can’t get their hands on a real Girl’s Backdoor, right? Of course, that’s assuming real ones actually exist. All I’m doing is preemptively stopping their evil deeds. You should be praising me as Dark Paladin Rendou Akiya, the hero who protects the city’s peace from the shadows!! C’mon, tell her I’m right, Shiroyama-chan!!”
“I don’t like that anyone’s excitedly buying these things, but I don’t like how you’re making such easy money either! Don’t underestimate a diligent part-timer girl! Roar!!”
The crossdressing boy fled with the librarian girl in hot pursuit. They forgot all about Kyousuke the second they took their eyes off of him, but he just sighed at his unchanging daily life.
He may have been a summoner who used the gods of legend as a stepping stone to reach his goal, but even he was fond of a peaceful life.
Even if he had no idea how long the peaceful part would last.

Part 3

They had to move classrooms for third period, so Kyousuke was walking down the hall at the end of the short break. He saw Student Council President Benikomichi Fuuki walking the opposite direction with her long black hair tied together at the end.
She seemed to have noticed him.
She was wearing her gym outfit, so she likely had gym class next.
“Hi, Shiroyama Boy. If you’re cooking something for home ec, call me afterwards.”
“My elective science is physics. We’ll probably just be clacking together metal balls suspended by strings.”
“Oh, that’s too bad.”
“I hear they’re making popsicles in chemistry. It’s part of an experiment where they sprinkle some salt in chunks of ice to lower the temperature below zero.”
“Oh, c’mon!! It’s not too late, so go see if you can change electives! And I really want a popsicle now!!”
A distant look entered Kyousuke’s eyes as he wondered if she would really be willing to eat a popsicle made with the school test tubes that probably had not been properly washed.
Then Benikomichi Fuuki’s cellphone vibrated.
Her expression clouded over a little when she checked it.
“What is it?”
“Well, I’m not sure why, but *some neighborhood kid* has really taken a liking to me. Honestly, and I told him to stop using his phone at school. I might have to teach him a lesson later.”
“…”
Kyousuke silently narrowed his eyes, but the student council president failed to notice.
“I’m really more into…y’know, an older, hardboiled kind of guy who looks good in a trench coat and drinking some whisky, but I guess you can’t always get what you want.”
As she spoke, Benikomichi Fuuki put her phone away.
But her gym outfit had no pockets, so it looked more like she was just sticking it into the side of her bloomers.
“By the way, Senpai, I’ve always wondered why the girls still wear bloomers here.”
“Hm? It isn’t that unusual in Toy Dream schools.”
“That’s not really an explanation.”

“Hah hah hah. This city is meant to make kids’ dreams and adult’s hopes come true.”
“That’s still not an explanation!!”
Without solving the mystery for him, Benikomichi Fuuki waved goodbye and left.
She had been an Illegal vessel who had been prepared to destroy the world’s current system to achieve her goal, but now *that incident had never happened in the first place.* He was not entirely sure if she was still registered with Illegal, but she was at least no longer working to take anyone’s lives.
And…
“Shiroyama-san.”
Someone called out to him from behind.
He looked back and saw a girl with short black hair.
He had once seen this somehow gloomy older girl listed as Umie Shouko in a newspaper article and heard her referred to as the rumored Rainy Girl. But now no gravestone bore her name and she was nothing more than a living girl who attended school like normal.
“Are you on your way to your next class?”
“I have my science elective next.”
“Oh, an elective… Then do you know where Ryouko-chan went? I want to give her this.”
She held an English-to-Japanese dictionary. She must have borrowed it from someone she knew. The same thing could be loaded on a smartphone for only two or three thousand yen, but there were still rules banning phones during class.
But that was not what caught Kyousuke’s attention.
“Ryouko…?”
“Um…oh. What if I called her the Librarian?”
“Oh!! …Ryouko?”
The answer seemed to confuse Kyousuke. It did not sound right to him.
“Librarian-chan has biology, so she’s on the third floor of the new building.”
“I see. So she’s taking biology, the one science a literary type can get through with rote memorization.”
There was nothing more to discuss, so Kyousuke waved goodbye and started to leave.
But then Umie Shouko whispered something to him.
“Keep looking after her for me, *Mr. Bunny.*”
“Hm?”
He looked back, but the girl simply waved and walked down the passageway leading to the new building.

Part 4

Before long, it was lunchtime.
Ordering two meals at the family restaurant that morning had increased the cost a fair bit, so he chose to be economical for lunch. Instead of using the cafeteria, he stopped by the school store and bought the “Expanding Bread” (aka Poor Bread) that was most popular with the athletic boys. He sat all alone on a bench in the courtyard to eat it.
The courtyard was not a bad location since the flower beds were fairly well tended to and it was nice and cool in the shade, but since the students preferred the more open feel of the rooftop, the courtyard was fairly unpopular despite how pleasant it was. It was also a troublesome spot because lovers would often meet up there afterschool, later realize it was in full view of the school building’s windows, get into arguments along the lines of “Stop watching us!!” “Stop doing it where we can’t help but see you!!” “Oh, you wanna fight!?”, and end up in a great war. But at lunchtime, it was nice and peaceful.
As Kyousuke battled the hunk of carbs that oddly expanded the more he chewed it and disturbingly never seemed to vanish from his mouth, a new visitor arrived in the lunchtime courtyard.
“Wow, wasting your teenage years eating lunch alone, are we?”
“R-Renge, um, don’t say that while looking him right in the eye.”
It was a pair of twin sisters.
Meinokawa Renge and Higan were both shrine maidens with long, straight hair, but Renge had stereotypical black hair while Higan had blonde hair and blue eyes, making them a tricky pair of shrine maidens.
To them this was a long-awaited reunion, but this sad vision must have blasted those emotions from their minds.
However, Kyousuke stared at the sisters with equally dead eyes due to the unreasonable scene he saw.
“Visitors aren’t allowed in this high school, so why are you two boldly walking around in shrine maiden outfits?”
“Because normal people forget all about summoners and vessels, of course.”
That made sense at first, but it was really the same as saying there was nothing wrong with walking around in the nude as long as no one knew it was you. They were throwing out their common sense in favor of their special traits. That line of reasoning was also why summoners and vessels tended to wear outfits that were far from normal and strayed from modern society.

But Kyousuke chose to kindly interpret it as them thinking people would assume their shrine maiden outfits were costumes for the Delayed Walpurgis.
“So what do you need today?”
“We have something to discuss with you.”
Kyousuke gestured for them to sit next to him on the bench, so blonde Higan sat down first.
But then black-haired Renge sat down between the two of them.
“Renge…”
“What? I’m supposed to protect you, Higan, so let me act as a barrier.”
For some reason, Meinokawa Higan got back up and forced herself between Kyousuke and Renge.
“Then I’ll protect you!”
“What!? You have some nerve as the younger twin!”
“Renge!”
“Higan!!”
“Ow, ow, ow, ow!! I feel like my thigh is being crushed by a steamroller here!!”
When Kyousuke raised his voice, the two shrine maidens finally stopped moving.
Kyousuke had been forced to the edge of the bench, Higan sat right next to him, and Renge was pressed tightly in beyond her. Once the crisis passed, the feminine body temperature and aroma finally reached him.
That said, this was not a part of the safe and peaceful life he wanted.
“Can you just get this over with and give me my daily life back?”
“Makihara Youji.”
Meinokawa Renge clung to her sister’s upper arm and spoke an unfamiliar name.
Kyousuke looked puzzled, so she held out a notebook-sized tablet.
It displayed a list of personal information.
The included photo showed a sharp-eyed boy with both sides of his hair dyed blond to emphasize the black hair in the center.
“You haven’t heard of him? He’s supposed to transfer into your class.”
He suddenly remembered that Rendou Akiya had mentioned that at breakfast.
But…
“Why is a summoner and vessel from the underside of the world discussing my class’s transfer student?”
“W-well, the thing about him is…strange things keep happening around him, so he’s been marked by people on ‘this side’ too.”
“More accurately, by Government. We were given a job by them, so we were wondering if you had overhead anything about him.”
“…”
Kyousuke fell silent.

A normal person like Rendou Akiya had been able to talk about the transfer student. That meant he had not been forgotten even while not in view of the naked eye. It seemed highly unlikely, but Kyousuke thought it was worth asking.
“Is it possible he’s a summoner or vessel like us?”
“We’re looking into that as well. At the very least, he doesn’t seem to be registered with Government. Illegal doesn’t release their records and Freedom doesn’t even keep a list since none of us are interested in anyone but ourselves. It’s impossible to be sure.”
“Just tell me what you know.”
“Makihara Youji himself is the kind of high school boy you can find anywhere. All of his paperwork is in order. He seemed to have made more than ten girlfriends at his previous school. The only real problem is why he’s changing schools.”
For one thing, it was strange to change schools in May when the school year had only just begun.
“You mean it isn’t due to his parents changing jobs or moving in with his grandparents?”
Hearing that, Renge fell silent for a moment.
She closed her eyes and inhaled.
Once she opened her eyelids again, she spoke.
“His home was burned down in a fire.”
“…”
It was Kyousuke’s turn to fall silent for a moment as he scrolled through the tablet’s information with a fingertip.
Ominous records were mechanically listed as brief lines of text.
“A-and when we looked into it, there was more than that,” added Higan.
“During a school trip at the beginning of spring, there was a landslide and everyone in that school year was killed. The fitness gym he attended was destroyed in a gas explosion. The mall he worked at part-time collapsed. A stalker attacked his home and his parents died. Um, people get caught in terrible tragedies wherever he goes, but he always ends up unharmed. And it just keeps happening. Plus, it’s all happened recently when he was a completely normal person receiving no real attention not long ago. It’s all been over the past few weeks.”
“It sounds like something from a horror movie, doesn’t it?” Renge waved a hand dismissively. “The funny part is every last one of the tragedies was caused by a girl Makihara was intimate with. You could almost say *he ordered the girls to do these things, they did everything he wanted,* and they destroyed themselves in the process.”
“Even the landslide and building collapse?”
“The landslide happened on a rainy day, but when the police investigated, they found it had nothing to do with that. They’ve been suppressing the information to avoid any social influence, but apparently a schoolgirl blew herself up using the construction explosives she was holding.”

“…”
No matter how unhealthy the sense of dependence developed, no one would go that far for a high school romance.
This was not the White Queen and her worshipers after all.
But Kyousuke had heard another worrisome rumor. His class had been talking about the transfer student just as much as a mysterious device that could bend teenage girls to one’s will.
Namely…
“Girl’s Backdoor.”
“Oh, so you’ve heard of it? Government seems to be showing an interest in it. But as a summoner, I do have to wonder *why it would be limited to girls*.”
“Um, there’s that state people get in when they lose during the Summoning Ceremony and get hit by the mental shock of their god being killed, right? They can only do simple things, but you can control them. And that slow-moving suggestible state continues for more than twenty-four hours.”
In other words, a summoner could bend someone to their will without a special device. It did not matter if you instructed them to take someone else’s life or their own.
“But that doesn’t make sense.” Kyousuke thought for a bit and opened his mouth once more. “That only happens after summoning a Material and fighting. If I defeated a normal soldier or guard, they wouldn’t end up like that. That would mean the victims of this Girl’s Backdoor thing are from our line of business.”
“Right. And summoners and vessels are removed from normal people’s minds, so the police wouldn’t even treat it as a real case. But these Girl’s Backdoor incidents are being recorded. …Government seems utterly perplexed by this. It is possible they’re all extreme rookies with only one or two digit Awards, though. Are they using Summoning Ceremony tech or not? If they are, is it a normal Blood-Sign system, or is it some variation on that? And if it is a variation, *does it end at just providing the hackneyed ability to have complete control over a girl, or is there more?* Those questions have pushed this way up their list of priorities.”
“…”
———Once, Azalea Magentarain and Guard of Honor had attempted to destroy the world just to hold an audience with the White Queen and to receive her love.
———Once, Benikomichi Fuuki and the other heir of Telomere’s End had attempted to destroy human society just to construct a world without death.
Both of those had broken down the Blood-Sign system and rebuilt it as a twisted variation.
They had also been resolved in secret so no one except Kyousuke knew about them.
Was something on the same level standing before him again?
Girl’s Backdoor.

That mysterious device would allow its user to manipulate someone close to them and even have them unquestioningly detonate the construction explosives they were holding. That alone was dangerous enough to mess with the world around Kyousuke.
“And conveniently enough, he’s stepped right into Alice (with) Rabbit Shiroyama Kyousuke’s territory, right? If Makihara Youji is aware what he’s doing here, he’s quite something. It wouldn’t hurt to be cautious.”
“Thanks.”
“If you’re really in trouble, um, we can help out at any time.”
“If it comes to that.”
After hearing that, the twin sisters put away the tablet and stood from the bench.
Renge pointed toward Kyousuke’s face.
“Listen. We don’t know yet whether or not this Girl’s Backdoor thing that Makihara Youji seems to be using is related to the Summoning Ceremony system. But it’s still dangerous even if it isn’t. In fact, we’re more likely to be caught off guard if it isn’t a part of our field of expertise. Even if you’re Freedom Award 903, I don’t think you should underestimate this guy.”
“Thanks for the warning.”
“Also…you didn’t wear a glove on your left hand last time we met, did you?”
“It’s a fashion statement.”
He waved his hand at the girls who tilted their heads while leaving the courtyard.
Kyousuke left the black leather glove on his left hand as he leaned back in the bench with the “Expanding Bread” in his other hand.
He slowly let out a short sigh.
A moment later, he heard a rustling in the bushes behind the bench and something was dumped on the ground like a garbage bag.
It was Makihara Youji.
This boy was suspected to have used Girl’s Backdoor to cause a number of incidents.
It was the same boy seen in the background information on the Meinokawa Sisters’ tablet.
However, he had been so severely beaten that the resemblance to the photo may not have been immediately obvious.
The villain had bruises and other marks all over his body, he could just barely be heard breathing, and his limbs were entirely limp. It was doubtful he was conscious.
Kyousuke did not even glance in his direction.
There was no real reason to confirm his presence at this point.
He leaned back in the bench and looked up into the blue sky as he munched on the “Expanding Bread”.
A short moment later, a small form left the bushes.
It was the vessel named Isabelle.
“Hey, hey. Where are we supposed to dump this?”

“It sounds like Government is interested, so let’s contact Aika.”
“Nuuun (deadpan). He’ll get away if we do that.”
“He won’t be able to move for a while after all that. With all those wounds, we could probably give him some zombie makeup and dump him on the side of the road for Government to pick him up in broad daylight. Everyone would think he had just gone overboard with his costume and gotten heatstroke.”
With that, it was over.
The concerning incident had ended before it even began.
“But this doesn’t seem to follow Freedom Award 903’s rules.”
“That’s because it doesn’t. These are the rules of a normal student.”
Kyousuke did not sound very interested. “I really don’t want to talk about turf or territory. It makes me feel like Illegal. Although I guess Government follows a similar concept.”
“I want to know how that Girl’s Backdoor thing works.”
“That I can’t tell you.” Kyousuke replied casually while *opening and closing his left hand and the glove he wore there.* “If I controlled a few people and took some physical data on them, I could probably figure it out pretty quickly, but that would be going too far. I don’t want to do that when I don’t even know if there are any side effects.”
“Could it be mass-produced to a super-sized extent?”
“That’s part of what I’ll look into. Although, looking at this guy, I doubt he has the brains or skill to create something like this.”
“Meaning?”
“It’s best to think there’s more to this. Or maybe I should say we still haven’t found the real villain.”
This was one down, but it was just the beginning.
“Then should we continue defending against future intruders?”
“Why?”
Kyousuke answered her with a question of his own.
Why should a professional work for free to protect this school?
Except that was not what he meant.
“Why do we have to stick to defense? Wouldn’t it be a lot simpler to go on the attack and crush the source of all this?”
“Hmm. Looking at it more rationally, that’s a small-sized…no, medium-sized bit better.”
“Just to be clear, this isn’t an official job for Freedom or Government. It’s pretty much a personal fight. And we don’t even know what we’re up against here. As we search around blindly, we might just find ourselves wandering deeper and deeper into the bog.”
“I’m fine with anything as long as my contract partner gives me the promised reward.”
The girl in a red military uniform did not seem to give it all that much thought.
And she made sure to add one more thing:

“Of course, that’s only if you promise to complete my job to a super-sized extent once it’s all over.”
His enjoyable school life had to be put on hold.
From here on, he would be living in the bloody world of summoners.

Or a Story Set Somewhat in the Past

This was the best.
Makihara Youji finally felt truly alive.
If he been asked to sum up his life, he would have used the words pointless and ineffective. It was not that he had received any cruel abuse at home or in the classroom. Nor had everyone constantly ignored him like he was invisible. But everywhere he went, he had found nothing but pain and humiliation. Whenever he recalled some moment from his past, he felt an urge to collapse on the spot and flail his arms and legs around.
He could speak a hundred words and be lucky to get two or three in response.
Even when he frequently updated a blog or SNS page connected to the entire world, the increase in the hit counter never left the single digits. No one ever left any comments.
It was all a waste of time and effort.
No one ever recognized his successes, but they were quick to lay on the insults when he failed. When he spoke to a group, none of them would turn his way, but when he verbally abused someone along with the group, all the attention would turn his way and they would turn on him.
He stood out in the worst possible way.
Everything worked against him.
How could this have happened?
He could work a hundred times harder than anyone else to be considerate and no one would give him a second glance, but when he complained even a hundredth as much as anyone else, they would attack him with the force of a raging wildfire. The pile of stones he had so carefully piled up would be mercilessly toppled and he would have to restart from the beginning. He even started suspecting everyone else in the world was conspiring against him.
But that unfairness was gone now.
The world had been corrected.
“Yes…”

Makihara Youji slowly held up his left arm and stared at the back of the hand.
“Everyone responds when I do something. A single word gets ten in response. That’s right. This is how the world is supposed to work.”
He lowered his raised hand and gaze and instead directed them both straight ahead.
There he saw a girl so slender he thought she might break if he pulled her in close. She was blankly swaying on her feet. If he commanded her to give him a shoulder massage, she would do so. If he demanded she strip naked, she could not put up a fight. He had to be careful about what he commanded since she really would bite off her tongue if he told her to, but things were generally going well.
This girl was held in the bonds of Girl’s Backdoor.
Makihara felt no pangs of conscience over externally and remotely controlling her body while ignoring her own wishes. After all, his life up to this point had been so very wrong. If everyone was given the same amount of luck to be used over their entire life, then he was only making things even. After all the pain and humiliation he had suffered through, what was wrong with being a little more special than the people around him?
And…
“Eek.”
A frail voice shrieked in a corner of the dark room.
Curled up there was a different girl from the one Makihara Youji was controlling.
“Eek, eek, eek, eek, eek…”
“Oh, shut up. Just accept the reality before your eyes already.”
Makihara’s voice was somehow cold.
With a glove on his hand, he moved his fingertips as if tugging on a marionette’s strings.
“As you saw from my tests, I can make this girl do whatever I want. I could have her go on a rampage with a knife or I could have her strip off all her clothes and run around town.”
“…”
“Of course, you can always abandon your friend. Then again, no one’ll ever believe what happened here, so no one’s ever going to take her side. But if you don’t like the sound of that, then I’d like you to help me contact some people.”
“…”
“You work in the entertainment industry, don’t you? Even just a guest ID would be fine. Then I can *use this* to get close to a number of people.”
As its name suggested, Girl’s Backdoor could not be used to control just anyone.
In fact, the conditions for its use were quite limited.
But what did that matter?

No man was an island. If he held one person's life in his hands, he could restrict the actions of a few people in their address book. It continued as a chain reaction from there. Like the Straw Millionaire, he just had to move from person to person, betraying them little by little, until he had arrived at and taken over an area he never could have reached otherwise. He could remote control them and bind them. In that sense, he was not restricted by sex or age. People were connected to others in unexpected places: politicians, corporate executives, the police, celebrities, and sports stars. He could reach them all through his chain reaction.
He had gone too far at his previous school.
But what exactly had he done that "went too far"?
He had already forgotten.
(Yes.)
He was so fulfilled that he felt no need to remember each and every thing. He had no need to contemplate the past when his future was so bright.
(This is what it feels like to hold the world in your hand.)
He was not out to rule over anything. His goal was not to obtain a specific person. He simply wanted everyone to pay attention to him. He wanted to create situations where they had no other choice. And that attention would eventually spread through the city, the country, and the entire world. He could not help but enjoy the gradual progress in that direction.
But just as he thought that, a deafening dull sound exploded from the back of his head.
……
……
……
His head hurt like his skull was swelling out. It throbbed with pain. Only after breathing in the dusty air did he realize he had fallen onto his side.
Had someone hit him?
Makihara Youji's mind was not functioning properly. It did not make the switch from confusion to fear. His arms and legs twitched but did not move, so he could not stand or even sit up.
He could not turn his head, so most of the room was a blind spot to him. He moved just his eyeballs and finally saw a boy and girl. As soon as he spotted them, their backs seemed to stab deep into his consciousness. It was like something he had previously failed to notice had risen rapidly through his mind.
"What do we do now?"
"I have the *sample* I wanted. Simply put, we don't need him anymore."
"But I get the feeling he'll get into some super-sized trouble if we just let him go."
"But who's supposed to pass judgment on him and how? There isn't an actual crime the police can charge him with."
"Zuuuun(deadpan)."
"Okay, fine. How about this?"

The horribly careless-sounding male voice continued.
“Let’s leave him here for about half an hour. We’ll let the girls he was controlling pass judgment. Don’t worry. If he’s innocent, they’ll probably tend to his hurt head.”
“W…ait.”
Makihara Youji squeezed out his voice.
The fear finally seeped out past the confusion. But the boy and girl did not seem to care. Their footsteps continued and they left.
“Wait!! Please wait! Don’t leave me…don’t leave me here!!”
He could not move.
And the other boy had a Girl’s Backdoor in his hand as he left. It was obvious where he had gotten it. Makihara Youji had lost the source of the power that had made him special.
Outside his field of vision, he heard several noises that sounded disturbingly like people picking up metal bars. Sweat poured from his entire body and he felt a squeezing pain in his heart.
“H-hel…help…”
It was all a waste of time and effort.
That dull and boring prison once more stole all depth from Makihara Youji’s world.
“Hey, wait! Please help me!!”
The footsteps stopped for just a moment.
When the voice reached him, Makihara was already in tears.
“I will help you.”
But…
“Once the half hour is up.”
That was all.
When he heard the door close, it was more like being buried alive than being imprisoned.
And…
And…
And…
Several people peered down at Makihara’s face.
The emotion in the girls’ eyes was as unfathomable as an insect’s.

Facts

- The vessel named Isabelle takes part in battles based on the personal reward she will receive.

- Based on Kyousuke and Isabelle’s conversations, the two of them took on some kind of job before binding their contract for the midair battle.
- Umie Shouko (aka the former Rainy Girl) remembers the deathless world incident that was altered and erased from existence.
- The behavior and outfits of summoners and vessels comes from a general desire to see just how far from the normal world they have grown. (According to Shiroyama Kyousuke)
- Makihara Youji, user of Girl’s Backdoor, was already defeated. For analysis purposes, Kyousuke retrieved the glove device thought to be Girl’s Backdoor.
- Kyousuke and Isabelle parted ways ahead of time in order to determine Makihara Youji’s location and prepare for their attack.
- They do not know for sure, but they doubt this ends with Makihara Youji alone. In fact, they are guessing the true villain has yet to be seen.

Stage 02: The Scheming and True Beginning of the Girl’s Backdoor

「だけどイザベルは仕事をするからには
爆盛り適切な報酬を見せてくれないと話にならない」
「はいはい。この杏仁豆腐で手を打つのはど……」

(Stage 02 Open 05/23 14:00)

ステージ02

少女使い、その暗躍と本格始動

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“But if I’m going to do any work, I need to be given a super-sized reward first.”
“Yes, yes. Would this almond jelly be suffic-…”
(Stage 02 Open 05/23 14:00)
The Scheming and True Beginning of the Girl’s Backdoor

Part 1

Toy Dream 35 was divided into twenty-six blocks shaped like pizza slices. Block A was known as the main entrance due to the international airport and the duty free shops surrounding it.
Perhaps because the giant amusement park city had been constructed by a monster of a foreign company, the area was plenty crowded even midday on weekdays. There were businessmen in suits, parents with children holding balloons, two lines of uniformed students out on some kind of school activity, and even a mascot in a full-body costume saying “gozaru, gozaru”. Countless nationalities, races, and religions were all mixed together. They all wore colorful outfits, but that was due to the Delayed Walpurgis costume event more than due to foreign fashion.
That may have been why one pair blended into the otherworldly background even though they should have been a walking landmark.
One of them was a girl of middle school age wearing hot pants and a short-sleeved shirt over a long-sleeved shirt, both of which left her midriff exposed. On her feet and legs, she wore black knee socks and sneakers. Her semi-long hair was dyed brown and a somehow lively light filled her eyes. She wore a thin chain around her neck, so some sort of accessory was probably hidden at her chest.
The other was a college-aged woman. She had a sharp shaggy hairstyle and her straight long hair was dyed pink. She wore a miniskirt waitress uniform colored white and pink. The headdress, gloves, and knee socks were decorated with elegant white lace. The corset around her waist and the suspenders for her skirt accentuated her already large breasts. For accessories, she wore a pair of horns on the sides of her head and a something like a tail on the back of her waist, but it made one think of something other than a cow.
It made her look like a demon.
What she held in her hand did not look like a bag containing clothing and everyday necessities. It looked more like a silver pipe folded in two, wrapped with a red leather belt, and given a handle near the middle.

The brown-haired girl glanced around with that woman by her side.
And she spoke.
“Biondetta, something isn’t right.”
“Yes, *everything is running more smoothly than expected.* If the Girl’s Backdoors we spread around in advance were causing trouble, the airport’s security level should have been increased.”
“So was that plan a dud?”
“I seriously doubt every last person was too afraid to use a gadget that stimulates one’s ‘desires’ so much, ma’am. That leaves only one possibility.”
“It worked, but someone already hunted them down, huh?”
The girl crossed her arms and rubbed her chin as she spoke under her breath.
She wore some sort of black leather glove on her left hand.
“But we made sure to choose people with no social connections and as little in common as possible. How could someone figure out who to suspect, find their location, and deal with them before it led to a commotion?”
“Ma’am, I suspect whoever it was predicted the algorithm rather than searching out their location.”
“You’ll need to explain it better than that.”
“It is true we worked to choose people as randomly as possible to make sure they could not all be defeated one after another. But some points in common were unavoidable.”
The demonic waitress raised her index finger.
“In other words, it had to be someone who would want to do awful things if they were given supernatural power. It had to be a weak-willed person whose rationality and conscience could not hold back their desires once they were given even slight power. That will naturally lead to similarities in their behavior.”
“So after capturing the first one, they used that one to create a flowchart?”
The girl spat out the words. “Biondetta, the original plan was for me to use the tenth Girl’s Backdoor to slip into Toy Dream 35 while the other nine threw the city into chaos. Then I was to quickly achieve my objective.”
“Yes, but I don’t see a paradise of naked girls awaiting orders as far as the eye can see, so we need to assume we will not receive the benefit of that disturbance tactic, ma’am.”
“What do we do now?”
“Yes, what *do* we do? How about we abort the mission and turn right back around?”
“Don’t joke.”
The girl pulled on the chain around her neck and produced the accessory that was the size of a large coin.
She snapped open the cover, looked at the photo inside, and then closed it once more.
She had made up her mind.

She had already been prepared to burn down the world and commit any hypocrisy if it meant achieving her objective.
“In that case, we’ll just have to keep going without everything we’d hoped for. Biondetta, keep in mind this could come down to a war of attrition. We must eliminate every last one of those Anthills and the people sucking up the sweet nectar they produce.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
The two of them continued speaking as they walked through the airport. Summoners and vessels were abnormal individuals who would be entirely forgotten once they left a normal person’s field of vision. But they could not escape people’s eyes that easily in a crowded international airport.
So of course, the young woman in charge noticed when the two of them tried to slip past the border control gate.
“U-um, excuse me! Uh, please get in line and wait your-…”
The girl ignored her and moved the black leather glove on her left hand. She placed her thumb and forefinger at a right angle as a handgun gesture and aimed the pointer finger forward.
Simply glaring at her target had immediate effects.
Several red threads that only she could see shot out. The ends of the threads contained thick phantom blades with a four-on-top, one-on-bottom structure. They resembled bear traps or a human hand and they tore into the airport workers arms, legs, and torso one after another.
Only the victim and the assailant could hear the series of painful sounds. And the airport worker was not allowed to speak a word despite the intense pain she felt.
“Get lost, amateur,” spat out the girl.
“———”
After what sounded like arms and legs folding up, the female worker forcefully turned around like a poorly-controlled marionette. She then took off running in a straight line without stopping.
The demon known as Biondetta gave an exasperated suggestion.
“Did you remember to specify ‘how far’ she is supposed to go, ma’am? I don’t think you had enough time to put together a proper *flow*.”
“I don’t know and I don’t care. This isn’t a problem with the specs of the Girl’s Backdoor you gave me.” The girl with semi-long hair spat out the words as she passed right through the gate that had lost its guard.
“Biondetta, recite our regulations.”
“Yes, ma’am. I, Biondetta, have bound a contract to assist my client, Murasame Kuina-sama. The contract lasts until your objective has been achieved and we will use any means necessary. You will pay for the necessary expenses such as weapons and ammunition and I will bear the responsibility for any deaths or injuries. And, if deemed necessary to achieve your objective, we will immediately attack anyone related or unrelated to the matter at hand.”
“Okay,” said the girl named Murasame Kuina.

Reciting the regulations may have acted as a switch for her.
“Good. We’ll be assuming the decoy Girl’s Backdoors had no effect, but that doesn’t change what we must do. Our target is Government and we’ll start crushing the locations we already know. For the locations we don’t know, we can check through the data we find in the rubble afterwards or use the Girl’s Backdoor to draw the data out of people. Do you understand the plan for the moment?”
However, Biondetta did not respond.

But not because she was being rude to her vessel and client.
Before she could respond, another voice cut in from the side.
“Hey, you! What do you think you’re doing!?”
Hearing a deep voice, the small girl started to form a handgun gesture with the hand in the leather glove, but she stopped partway through.
The guard who approached was a middle-aged man.
Murasame Kuina released the half-made gesture, waved her opened hand, and spoke to the demon next to her.
“Biondetta.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
As soon as the woman answered, she released the “luggage” she carried.
The red leather belt came apart and the folded silver pipe became a single long rod engraved with an ivy pattern. While listening to the latch click into place, the demon’s slender fingers stroked smoothly across its side.
This was a Blood-Sign.
It was the symbol of the summoners who used even the gods of legend as a stepping stone to reach their goals. Biondetta smiled thinly as she spun it around and pointed it at the confused guard.
“If we could only have escaped your field of vision or controlled you with Girl’s Backdoor, *we could have settled this peacefully.*”
A thud followed her words.
Something had fallen to the ground from between the demon’s legs and up her short skirt.
It was a black sphere less than five centimeters across.
Was the poor victim even aware it was an Incense Grenade with the pin pulled?
An incredible tremor shook the entire airport.
The gods may have been rooting for those who lived honest lives, but summoners could move beyond the Divine-class.

Part 2

Shiroyama Kyousuke sat on the roof of an office building among the high-rise buildings of R Block. One end of his Blood-Sign was sticking off the building, the railing acted as a fulcrum, and he sat on the other end.
He held his smartphone in one hand.
“This is the ninth one. Aika, do you think there might be more Girl’s Backdoors out there?”
Short, panicked breaths interrupted his conversation.

He glanced into the air beyond the railing and saw a young man in a janitor's uniform dangling down from the Blood-Sign's tip caught on the back of his collar.
Just like with a seesaw, Kyousuke could not sit on the Blood-Sign without that.
The Government middleman spoke quietly over the phone.
"They were probably just expendable decoys, so they wouldn't have received any accurate data from the real culprit. But based on the confessions we've gathered from the captured Girl's Backdoor users, a total of nine seems likely."
"Ghhh (deadpan)."
Isabelle wore a red military uniform with a tight skirt and several black belts and she leaned over the railing to reach toward the janitor man without worrying about the view it gave Kyousuke of her small butt.
However, she was not attempting to save the dangling man.
"Good, good. I just super-sized retrieved the Girl's Backdoor from his left hand."
"Then *do you even need him* anymore?" asked Aika.
At that moment, Kyousuke got up from the Blood-Sign seesaw.
The Blood-Sign seemed to rotate more than tilt as it quickly swung around.
Just before the nearly vertical object actually fell, Kyousuke grabbed it in one hand.
At the same time, the janitor man vanished from the world while trying to shout some kind of excuse. The Doppler Effect transformed his scream as it grew more distant and it was finally punctuated with a splash of water far below.
"Whatever the case, it's lucky we managed to stop them before they actually did anything."
"I would expect nothing less of my Onii-chan."
"I'm not commenting on that anymore. Anyway, how did you get them to talk after we beat them up, threw them on the side of the road with zombie makeup on, and let an ambulance pick them up? Did you drag them into a garage lined with plastic sheets and use a raincoat and vegetable grater combo?"
"Please, we're not that hunk of fat from Illegal. The great Government would never do anything so uncivilized. Torture is a war crime banned by international treaties."
"But I doubt those scumbags would just tell you the truth."
"All we did was invite them to a royal suite room in the Princess Gate Hotel. They're probably ordering champagne in the finest of rooms right about now."
"Hm? Wait. Don't tell me…"
"But the way the world at large sees things, the rooms are listed under those scumbags' names. …So what will they think when they see the bill? The room alone is about 500,000 yen a night and the food and other

services cost extra, so their debt will balloon out of control real fast. And they can't solve this just by leaving the room. They will find that they are strangely unable to checkout no matter how much they complain at the front desk. …Not until they have Government's permission anyway."
You people are the worst, thought Kyousuke while sympathizing with the enemy.
It was a lot like sneaking into someone's house while they were on an overseas trip, removing the phone from the hook, and leaving it connected to an automated premium rate information service. No obvious torture was needed to apply pressure to someone. With the proper preparations, making them feel like they were wasting precious time worked just fine. The balloon known as their heart would be filled to the limit in no time.
This would only look like they were treating someone to a top quality room, so Government was frightening in a pure sort of way.
Isabelle toyed with the Girl's Backdoor leather glove in her hand.
"Nuuun (deadpan). What should we do with this?"
"If we throw it in a train station coin locker, the world police at Government will retrieve it. It isn't very exciting, but that's their job."
At that point, Aika said something more over the phone.
"Onii-chan, we just got in some new information."
"?"
"Someone's started a Material battle in A Block's international airport. At the very least, it isn't a summoner and vessel pair registered with Government."
"Is it related to the issue we're dealing with?"
"There was some evidence suggesting a Girl's Backdoor was used just before the Artificial Sacred Ground appeared."
Kyousuke thought for a moment and then honestly spoke his question.
"This time I can't see the algorithm. I can't imagine where they'll go next."
"Then could this be the real culprit who was distributing them to the scumbags?"
"That I can't say. Can you at least track them for us?"
"Summoners and vessels vanish from all cameras and sensors while using an Incense Grenade."
"Follow the gazes of the normal people around there. Even if you can't see them on the cameras, the people will be focusing on some spot for no apparent reason. That's where the summoner and vessel will be. Follow that line and you'll have their route."
Even as he gave instructions, Kyousuke knew they were playing catchup here.
They did not have enough information. He could not predict what their opponent was thinking. They could never catch up if all they did was chase after whoever this was.
What did he need to fill that gap?
How could he catch up?

Part 3

It could be a school, a hospital, a prison, a sports gym, a prep school, a hotel, a cruise ship, a military base, a police station, a fire station, a company, a space station, a largescale farm, or anything else.
It just had to have more than a certain number of people being managed as a group as well as a “framework” that hid them from the outside world to a certain extent.
Murasame Kuina, the girl served by Waitress Demon Biondetta, was after the Anthills, but they had not been informed about every single one. So their plan was to attack the one they knew about and gather information on any unknown Anthills from there. If that was not enough, they would control people with Girl’s Backdoor and contact someone who knew the answer.
It was like a computer virus.
By repeatedly destroying and infecting, they would start at a single point and spread throughout the system.
Thus, they started by bringing down the Anthill in D Block that they knew about.
It took the form of a live music club.
When they were still walking along the giant bridge outside the highly soundproofed building, the girl with semi-long brown hair was already whispering to the demon next to her.
“Biondetta.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
They must have used an “under construction” sign or information on their website because the crowed vanished from the bridge. Then someone slowly stepped out from the building in question.
It was an unattractive middle-aged man in a ratty old suit and a slender girl in a dress with an extremely girly design.
The man asked a question while pulling a similarly faded hat deep over his eyes.
“I assume you two are Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat. We heard you caused some trouble down at A Block’s airport.”
Instead of answering, the brown-haired girl looked to the demon next to her.
“Explain.”
“Yes, ma’am. I believe this is Government Award 809, Scorpion 11.”
“Then should it be an easy victory?”
“Why of course. However, this summoner has something of a legendary jinx. He is constantly taking on opponents he should not be able to defeat and yet he always survives until the end.”

“It doesn’t matter. Biondetta, win this for me.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
The man in the ratty old suit let out a gentle sigh.
“I can’t believe this.”
With those words, several solid sounds surrounded the brown-haired girl and the waitress demon. There were ten in all. The sources of the sounds came from all directions, including up and down. Instead of just standing on the giant bridge, they also clung to the building walls and the bottom of the bridge passing by overhead.
These were Government Repliglass soldiers.
By wearing external armor made from silicon stem cells, these next generation soldiers took the form of other animals and plants while enhancing or interpreting their traits and abilities.
Specifically, these were Snails. They wore giant round backpacks and their legs were enveloped by a sticky material that allowed them to cling to walls and ceilings. The backpacks contained high-pressure water sprayers that took in powder from the building materials (such as concrete or steel) worn down by the leg units and produced enough destructive power to instantly slice through twenty centimeters of steel from a distance of fifteen hundred meters.
This many of them this close would be fatal.
The targets could not escape on foot and would be sliced in two along with the wall if they hid behind cover.
“Sorry, but this is how Government does things.”
“Exactly the disgusting methods I would expect from an Anthill.”
“We get that a lot. But this is the optimal answer,” said Scorpion 11 without a hint of emotion in his voice. “We don’t bother looking worthless wannabe villains in the eye. The protective circle protects the summoner and the Material protects the vessel during battle, but without setting up an Artificial Sacred Ground, you’re nothing but flesh and blood. Even if you pull out an Incense Grenade now, we can kill you twenty times over before you pull the pin. That keeps me from earning many Awards, so it is a bit of a problem.”
“…”
“I don’t really care either way, but the higher ups want to hear what you have to say. But since I don’t care, that gets a pretty low priority from me. Will you surrender, or will you die? It’s your choice.”
The waitress demon jokingly raised her hands a little and laughed cruelly.
“What’s so funny?”
“Oh, nothing much.” Biondetta moved her lips while relaxing her shoulders. “It’s just that our nemesis has already overlooked three things he can’t afford to overlook and that is hopelessly funny.”
Scorpion 11 narrowed his eyes a little.

The surrounding Snails produced quiet creaking noises from the nozzles of the high pressure water sprayers that could slice through steel panels like butter.
The demon ignored it all as she spoke.
“First, you gave a warning before firing. Then again, that’s probably a unique Government trait since you like to call yourselves the world police and you probably wanted to take us alive and do a background investigation to put your minds at ease.”
There was no tension in her voice.
It was like the hand of a clock slowly turning.
“Second, an Artificial Sacred Ground can only be set up if we can see our target with the naked eye when the Incense Grenade detonates. If you were going to stand in front of a summoner, you should have at least used a smoke or stun grenade.”
Or perhaps this was another act.
It was all to let Murasame Kuina, the client who had bound a contract with that demon, comfortably achieve her goal.
“Third, you let your pride get the better of you when you don’t even know what kind of Incense Grenade I use. You don’t know the size, the shape, the chemicals used, how I use it, or anything at all.”
The waitress demon spread her legs wider than her shoulders.
With a metallic thunk, a sphere one size smaller than a baseball fell from her miniskirt and onto the bridge.
Scorpion 11 reacted by pulling his hat even deeper over his eyes.
And he spoke.
“Too bad.”
That settled everything.
Incense Grenades came in a variety of types, but most detonated at an average of three to five seconds after pulling the pin. And without setting up an Artificial Sacred Ground, the summoner and vessel were helpless. If the Snails released their high-pressure water attacks from a total of twenty different directions, their bodies would be torn to pieces before the detonation.
So this would end it.
On their signal, the Snails did not hesitate to release the great power built up in the tanks on their backs. With the assistance of pressurized air, the thin, thin layer of concrete and steel carved away by the foot units was turned to a powder, mixed with the water, and given the effect of a file using ultra high speeds. The end result was much like multiple simultaneous laser-like sniper shots.
But just beforehand…
“Nee hee☆”
The demon laughed.

A quiet clicking sound came from Biondetta's mouth as if she had ignited an electric lighter there. Did anyone there realize that was the sound of her biting the switch for which *she had swapped out one of her back teeth?*
At the same time, the demon and the client girl were tugged backwards as if by an invisible elastic cord. Due to the extreme accuracy of the high pressure water attacks from twenty directions, the two of them completely escaped by vanishing from those coordinates so suddenly.
To set up an Artificial Sacred Ground, the Incense Grenade had to detonate while the target was in view.
When the Artificial Sacred Ground opened, the summoner and vessel were automatically moved to its center.
But it was not necessary for the summoner to be holding the Incense Grenade when it detonated. It was just as effective from a distance.
Meaning…
(Before approaching, they must have set up an Incense Grenade with a wireless detonator instead of a timed one. Then they showed themselves and dropped a decoy right in front of us. *As long as she could see us with the naked eye,* nothing else mattered. By manipulating our aim, she can begin the Summoning Ceremony battle in a more advantageous position.)
As he thought to himself, Scorpion 11 pulled out an old match and scraped it against the bridge's railing. What looked like a sharp spear of fire followed the movement of his arm and then he held a Blood-Sign made of ultra-hard black charcoal that resembled diamond.
"Ayaka, get ready."
"Understood."
Their opponent was clinging to the wall of a building more than thirty meters away.
The waitress demon undid the belt and connected the two pieces of her Blood-Sign.
Since Artificial Sacred Grounds were twenty meter cubes on average, it might seem that they were out of range, but that was not the case. Even if the Material itself could not leave the Artificial Sacred Ground, projectiles could do damage outside of there. In other words, Scorpion 11 could leave them be and let the Snails deal with it.
Or so he thought.
But then he heard an ear-splitting gunshot.
Biondetta's tail decoration had been swaying as she raised her Blood-Sign. But she was not holding it like a summoner would. She pressed the bottom against her shoulder, placed her gaze along the side of the long rod to aim, and prepared her finger to flick a clasp that stuck out somewhat. It looked a lot like someone aiming a sniper rifle.
"Nee hee☆"
Scorpion 11 saw a smile.

The waitress demon was targeting his vessel Ayaka instead of him. Did she think she could crush the girl's human body before the Material could be summoned inside it?
But…
"…"
The rifle bullet did not pierce the young girl's face.
An extended high-pitched vibration shook the air. Scorpion 11 had held his Blood-Sign in front of the girl's eyes to slightly divert the bullet's path.
Before a few severed hairs could fall from the girl's head, both summoners began to move.
The Liar Cat waitress demon attached a cork-like part to the tip of her Blood-Sign and the unattractive Scorpion 11 man pulled a cylindrical Incense Grenade from his suit pocket, pulled the pin, and threw it toward the summoner and vessel attached to the wall.
When it detonated, the Scorpion 11 pair was also freed from gravity, flew through the air, and attached to the building wall. They had intruded on their opponent's Artificial Sacred Ground.
Just like during a Chain state, anyone could enter an Artificial Sacred Ground with no enemy inside.
They were more than ten meters apart.
They glared at each other as the three-dimensional Rose appeared between them.
Scorpion 11 held his hat low over his eyes while speaking in a low tone.
"I'll kill you."
"That was my intention from the beginning."
They both hit White Thorns straight forward. The Rose shattered into Petals of low, middle, high, and lowest sound ranges and ricocheted all over the Artificial Sacred Ground. A few of them were knocked into the dark fist-sized holes known as Spots.
Liar Cat had the Original Yellow(s). Sound Range: High. Cost: 1.
Scorpion 11 had the Original Red(b). Sound Range: Low. Cost: 1.
Both Materials were three meter masses of slime.
(I have the advantage in the three-way deadlock. That means she'll try to change sound ra-…)
Scorpion 11 quickly got to thinking, but his mind soon went blank.
The waitress demon specialized in spin shots that sharply struck her White Thorns on the edges instead of the center. They flew along even sharper curves than a curveball in baseball. They moved almost like a boomerang as they slipped past any Petals in the way and accurately knocked just the desired Petals into the Spots.
That was enough of a threat on its own, but it was not the most frightening thing about Biondetta.

Scorpion 11: Original Red (b). Sound Range: Low. Cost: 1.

Liar Cat: Demonic Corpse (wm). Sound Range: Low. Cost: 2.

Scorpion 11: Devouring Wings (lvz – fd). Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 5.
Liar Cat: Bound Armor (re – ia – dr). Sound Range: Middle. Cost 6.

Scorpion 11: Predatory Fire (lvz – wzb). Sound Range: High. Cost: 6.
Liar Cat: Celestial Blade (tix – a – wuh). Sound Range: High. Cost: 7.

(This woman!!)
One side had a flying monster that looked like an enraged skull contained within a giant flame.
The other side had a giant double-edged Western sword that sliced through the air as it flew around on its own.
But as each Material changed to another too fast to visually keep up, the unattractive Scorpion 11 man clenched his teeth.
He knew what his opponent was trying to do.
A mocking smile appeared on the waitress demon's lips as she swung around her Blood-Sign that doubled as a sniper rifle.
"Oh, dear. Is something the matter?"
"You're intentionally matching my sound range. And you're always staying one cost above me!"
"Yes. There's no need to even think about that three-way stalemate if I just follow your lead. If the sound ranges are the same, the one with the higher cost will naturally win. Plus, the Material summoned first is worn down quicker."
The corners of Biondetta's lips rose like melted cheese.
"In other words, whoever goes second has the advantage using the Blood-Sign Summoning Ceremony."
"…"
Her method of fighting utterly abandoned all thought and effort.
Her heretical method simply looked at her opponent's Material, matched the sound range, and easily tore victory from their grasp.
But…
"Did you really think you could defeat me like that?"
A White Thorn audibly collided with a Petal.
Scorpion 11 specialized in forceful power shots.
"The Blood-Sign method is more than playing your hands and seeing whose is better. It's a fight for the Petals scattered around the sacred ground. In theory, you might be able to corner me by constantly matching my sound range, but it won't work that well in practice. The Petals aren't arranged in

a perfect mirror image, so you'll eventually run out of resources if you keep mimicking me!!"
He simply had to preemptively take away the Petals she would need.
He simply had to eliminate them.
That way she would lack the Petals needed to mimic him.
And if he continued to build up his Material while she ran back and forth in pursuit of the Petals, he could increase his cost enough to defeat Liar Cat without much trouble.
"The Blood-Sign method isn't that simple."
Scorpion 11 belatedly realized the blood was rushing to his head.
He may have had a fair bit of pride in his Government job even though he had viewed it as a mere bureaucratic position.
"You lost because you didn't understand that."
But…
He heard a giggle.
The laughter had come from the waitress demon named Biondetta.
And she spoke.
"Did you think this was all I had?"
Only five seconds later, a great noise rang out and Scorpion 11 was defeated.

Part 4

C Block was a cheap Chinatown much like a movie set. But that may have been unavoidable since it had been built as an attraction or theme park based on Western ideas of China rather than appearing naturally like a normal Chinatown.
To match the color of the block, most of the costumes were based on Chinese entertainment. There was even a shirtless kung fu man and a Jiangshi girl who had gone all out and painted all of her skin blue.
Shiroyama Kyousuke and Isabelle had arrived at a *caiguan* – that is, a Chinese restaurant – run by Illegal, one of the three major powers. However it was a relatively cheap restaurant and it was more like a set meal shop.
The restaurant had just dealt with the lunch rush and was now bringing in tourists looking for a dessert of sesame balls or almond jelly.
But it turned out someone was there ahead of them.
A boy of about ten must have stopped by on the way back from school because he still wore his school backpack as he pouted his lips next to the modified China dress beauty named Lu Niang Lan.

According to him…
“It makes me angry when you talk with other guys.”
“Oh, my.”
“But that’s a bad feeling, so this can’t be a good thing! So I’m trying to cool my head!!”
“Oh, my, my.” The small boy finished eating a mango pudding snack as he spoke with Lu Niang Lan and he left the restaurant after checking the time on his cellphone.
The Illegal tool dealer waved goodbye with a smile and then called over a nearby employee.
“Wang-san, could I ask you a favor? It’s urgent.”
“I’d really rather you didn’t, Miss Lu.”
“His emotional points have crossed a certain line, so dress up as a thug and scare him for me. I don’t want him ever wandering around stores connected to Illegal ever again. And of course make sure you don’t hurt him.”
“No fair, Miss Lu. You always shove the dirty work onto me!”
The large muscular man complained, but he still scratched his head with one hand and walked to the back of the restaurant. He was probably on his way to “dress up”.
Kyousuke and Isabelle walked in to take the boy’s place and Kyousuke spoke up with some exasperation in his voice.
“I don’t see why you have to go that far. Normal people forget we even exist as soon as they take their eyes off of us.”
“But the routine of visiting this *caiguan* remains. And in certain circumstances, this place could be the site of a shootout or a terrorist bombing. Or he might get abducted as a bargaining chip. That’s the kind of work we do. I don’t like talking about responsibility after the fact *as if I suddenly remembered it exists*.”
She sighed and glanced toward the door the boy had left through.
As if to switch over her train of thought, she looked back to the table and gestured with her slender hand for Kyousuke and Isabelle to sit.
“Welcome to the Hai Hong Caiguan. Is this the vessel you were talking about, Kyousuke-chan?”
“Yes. My name is Isabelle, so you can call me Isabelle.”
“Umm? Well, whatever. Nice to meet you.”
“It’s super-sized nice to meet you.”
The modified China dress beauty crossed her legs after sitting at the table that was not particularly red and did not spin.
“So did you visit this Illegal base because you wanted information on the person disseminating the mysterious gimmick known as Girl’s Backdoor?” She sounded a little exasperated. “You’re always walking a dangerous road, aren’t you?”
“Well, it’s just that I can’t read the culprit’s algorithm, but that’s because I don’t have enough data to derive that algorithm. So I was thinking that Aika’s…that is, Government’s information sources alone weren’t enough. In

that case, I might be able to see their algorithm if I can go at this from a different angle and get some new data.”

The world of the Summoning Ceremony came down to a standoff between Government and Illegal.
And Freedom was only an unrestricted neighbor that mediated the issues between them.
It was just that each member of Freedom was such a powerful warrior that they ended up acting like a third major power.
“Hmm. So is that glove on your left hand the rumored Girl’s Backdoor? This is my first time seeing one in person.”
“Yeah. I can’t believe someone was handing these things out.”
“Oh, my, my. Speak of the devil. My body is moving all on its own… What could be happening?”
“Why is that making you lean up against me!? And I think you’re a little old to call a ‘girl’.”
“Did you say something? I’ll just have to drown it out with a young woman’s charm!”
Lu Niang Lan sat sideways on his lap and wrapped her arm around his shoulder while jokingly rubbing her voluptuous body against him. It was no longer an issue of which specific parts of her body were rubbing against which specific parts of his body. Her seductive assault threatened to drag his soul away if he did not focus his mind.
“And if you defeated the enemy and got a sample Girl’s Backdoor, why not use it for some sexy fun!? Or are you not satisfied unless you win her over with your own power? Oh, that just makes you an even greater catch, Kyousuke-chan!!”
“Umm, can we move on with the discussion?”
“Well, keeping it around but not actually using it *is* exactly what I would expect from you. You’ll do whatever it takes to win, but you set up these boundaries in the weirdest places.”
“What are you talking about? I’ll use any weapon available to me. I just haven’t been blessed with an opportunity yet.”
“Can I throw that right back at you? What are you talking about, Kyousuke-chan?”
“Get back on topic.”
“You say that, but…”
Lu Niang Lan moved away from him, placed her index finger on her chin, and looked up at the ceiling.
Military Uniform Girl Isabelle stared curiously at the almond jelly the waiter placed in front of her, but for some reason, she did not eat any. She may have been able to restrain herself from her personal preferences if it was not part of her “contract and reward” system.
Kyousuke had no choice but to sigh and make a request.
“Sorry, Isabelle, but…”
“…”
“Can you hand me the soy sauce?”

“A-ahem(deadpan). But if I’m going to do any work, I need to be given a super-sized reward first.”
“Yes, yes. Would this almond jelly be suffic-…”
The small bottle of soy sauce approached him with deadly force.
He accepted it in shock and Isabelle breathed from her small nose and boldly stabbed a spoon into the almond jelly. If he had swiped it from her now, he had a feeling she would murder him not with a knife or fork, but with the spoon.
“Delish(deadpan).”
At least she seemed happy. No other response came to mind.
“To be honest, Illegal is lacking in information on Girl’s Backdoor. And to be blunt, we only really noticed it when you contacted me, Kyousuke-chan.”
“Does that mean Illegal played no part in the production and use of Girl’s Backdoor?”
“I’d guess this is either Government or Freedom. …Or maybe the former hiring the latter for a job☆” Lu Niang Lan sounded cheerful. “Illegal is a little more focused on another issue. In the Pacific, we were supposed to steal a Government leader and the results of their research, but some summoner challenged us to a midair battle and even destroyed our mobile air squadron which included a disguised aircraft carrier. It apparently caused significant damage, but oddly enough there were precisely zero deaths.”
“Cough, cough.”
Kyousuke began coughing to avoid the issue.
Then the waiter silently approached Lu Niang Lan’s side.
He whispered something into her ear and she indifferently revealed the information.
“Kyousuke-chan, it seems things are on the move with Government.”
“?”
“A Government base in D Block was attacked and destroyed. And I doubt it’s just a coincidence given the timing. And I also doubt anyone would use a Government summoner to attack Government and this has nothing to do with Illegal.”
“So our enemy here is Freedom…”
“Right, right. Now, I’m sure you’ll be contacting the wild beast girl soon. Since I’m in a bit of a bullying mood, can you ask her something for me?”
“You don’t want me to ask Aika her weight or her measurements, do you? I’d rather not have a five meter white liger tear me to pieces in your place, Lu-san.”
“If you asked her that, she’d answer without batting an eye. And that would be boring. That’s why I’ll give you something much more difficult to answer.” She laughed. “Ask her about the Anthills.”
“The Anthills?”
“Oh, don’t look to me for answers. Not even Illegal has the whole picture of that term.”

“So it’s some kind of classified information that Government is desperate to keep hidden?”
“And we had suspected that the live music club that was attacked in D Block was one of those Anthills. Someone disseminated those flashy Girl’s Backdoors as a largescale disturbance tactic and then made a pinpoint attack on an important Government base. I can almost see them holding their heads in their hands.”

Part 5

After asking Government Middleman Aika over the phone, she made the following suggestion:
“There’s something I’d like to discuss with you too. I would appreciate it if you could visit my apartment.”
“You can’t discuss it over the phone? But you shouldn’t have to worry about the encryption strength of this connection.”
“The Anthills are a bit of an embarrassment for us.” Aika sounded annoyed. “Between members of Government would be one thing, but I don’t want to leave behind any official records that I passed information to Freedom. Do you understand my situation now?”
That was why Kyousuke and Isabelle made their way to Aika’s luxury apartment.
Inside a living room large enough for a game of tennis, Swimsuit Girl Aika waited for them while lounging on the five meter white liger she used as a sofa. Perhaps to maintain her pride as a shut-in, she ignored the Delayed Walpurgis going on outside. She wore her swimsuit year-round.
“Welcome home, Onii-chan.”
“I told you I’m not going to bother complaining about that stuff anymore.”
“If anyone’s going to complain, it’s me.”
“?”
Kyousuke looked confused, so Aika pointed at him again and again while leaning against the wild beast.
Technically, she was pointing at the girl in a red military uniform standing next to him.
“How many times! Do I have to tell you!! This is a shut-in girl’s final stronghold!? Why would you so blithely bring another girl here, Onii-chan!? Come to think of it, it was the same thing with Olivia Highland!!”
Isabelle slowly tilted her head in her red hat.

“Then I have the perfect solution: you leave. Point(deadpan). This does not bother me even a small-sized amount.”
“Dbhloebgabrmdgrzvebrfehh!?”
Aika was so angry at having her shut-in territory not just invaded but nearly stolen that her limiter broke.
Kyousuke ignored it and tried to get back on track.
“I’ll ask you again: What are these Anthills that Lu-san mentioned?”
“Drfdrndrn!! Pant, pant. Wh-why would you mention her…!? And curse that hunk of fat. Where did she even get data on that?”
While Aika’s mind nearly stalled, the white liger must have been worried because she got up, raised her head, and licked the swimsuit girl with her giant tongue. But until an evil god arrived from some distant star, it would never look like anything more than the animal grooming the girl.
“Not so much, liger. Your tongue is rough and it hurts… But anyway. You could say the Anthills are Government facilities for mass producing vessels. But it’s more sinful than simple education. Studying at school is nothing more than adding knowledge and technique to the base of inborn talent.”
“Mass producing…vessels?”
“Government has come a long way in training summoners, but we are chronically lacking when it comes to vessels. The rookies are sent out as Repliglass soldiers and only those who can overcome the baptism of blood sans vessel can gain any power. But what if we found a way to solve that problem?”
“Constructed talent? That would mean…”
Kyousuke glanced over at the military uniform girl standing next to him. Isabelle said nothing.
Aika shrugged and answered instead.
“A summoner’s skill increases with knowledge and technique, but a certain form of talent is everything for vessels. You could call it their talent as a spirit medium. Normally, that’s unchangeable and you have to recruit people based on their inborn foundation, but Government has started working on that field.”
“Artificially implanting people with spirit medium talent, you mean?” groaned Kyousuke.
A certain pair of twins came to mind. Higan’s family had hoped she would be an excellent summoner, but she had ended up living as a vessel due to being born with that talent as a spirit medium. Renge, a Joruri Method, had been artificially created in her place as the ideal summoner those around them had wanted.
Higan’s blonde hair and blue eyes had been the result of the various efforts her family had put into removing that talent.
If there were techniques to remove it, could they be converted into techniques to add it in?
“Onii-chan, do you remember the specialty of Maria Heartocean who you protected before?”

“Spiritual damage research.”
“This is a problem. I am being medium-sized…no, large-sized left behind here.”
“You can think of it as the troubles that get stuck to your soul. We still haven’t found a definition for the soul itself, but some researchers are trying to use this to work back to that truth. It’s like how we can’t observe a black hole itself, but we can search out its identity using the space-time distortions around it. Which means…”
“The unprofitable foundation of her research isn’t enough to raise the funding she needs. That’s why Maria dragged tons of money from the high officials by demonstrating some effective applied research that’s so simple even an idiot can understand its value.”
“…”
“The Anthills have two major benefits.”
Aika raised her index finger.
“First, they simply increase the number of vessels which strengthens our forces. After all, Government has so many rookie summoners that we have to send them out as Repliglass soldiers when they finish their training and don’t have a vessel to pair up with. Just giving all of them a vessel would destroy the current balance between the three major powers.”
She raised her middle finger too.
“Second, if we can increase the quality of their spiritual medium talent, they will be able to control the Materials with much greater accuracy. The most they can do now is direct the Material toward a target, but they would then be able to accurately dodge attacks and focus on critical attacks that target the Silhouette weak point. That could lead to upsets beyond the existing three-way deadlock and cost differences.”
However, there had to be more than just benefits.
For one, how exactly where they implanting this talent? Since it was linked to their ability to act as a medium for spirits, it had to be more than just drilling a hole in their skull and messing with their brain. It would require remaking them so completely that it could be medically called “changing who they are”.
And what would it mean to have extremely high talent as a spirit medium? Even normal vessels had to wear collars, handcuffs, or other decorative restraints to manage the data port and prevent their body from being taken over by an evil or vengeful spirit. What if they grew even more sensitive to that? What if external measures were no longer enough? It was said some people in the West would have a portion of their stomach or cerebellum removed to lose weight, but when it did not fit their lifestyle, apparently quite a few of the patients would later ask the impossible and beg to be returned to normal. What if something similar was occurring in the field of spirit mediums?
“…”
“Why are you giving me that scary look? Hanyaaan(deadpan)???”

“No reason,” said Kyousuke as he shook his head toward the military uniform girl.
Would anything have changed had he known the details from the beginning? What good was it wondering now whether or not he should have saved the researcher?
“Anyway.” Kyousuke ended that line of thought and changed his focus.
“After the incident at the airport, the Anthill in D Block was attacked. Given the timing, it doesn’t seem like they checked into a hotel in between. Unlike the Girl’s Backdoor incidents, it’s hard to imagine this is a diversion or bait. In fact, they probably tried to spread our focus with the Girl’s Backdoors because they knew they were taking such a direct route. We’ve finally found them. This is the original enemy. This is our enemy. *Isabelle, this is your target.*”
“Hmm. If that algorithm is correct, Onii-chan, then you’ve figured out a fair bit, haven’t you?”
“Hunyuuun(deadpan)? I still don’t get it. Not even a small-sized bit.”
“A lot is at stake with these Anthills. Illegal and Freedom are in trouble if Government gets as many vessels as they want and Government might find enemies within their own ranks. For example, a skilled recruiter might lose their job if vessels can be mass produced so easily.”
Kyousuke then added a “but”.
“*Whoever this is* isn’t able to restrain themselves. They know it’s risky, but once they saw their target, they took the quickest route there. If they had calmly calculated out what is at stake and decided crushing this project was worth it, they wouldn’t act like this. It feels like they’re acting on emotion rather than a calculated plan. But I also feel like they’re beautifying that emotion and using it to excuse their own lack of restraint. But at the same time, there’s none of the intense waves of an incubation period and an actualized period that you see in people with a lust for destruction. They’re keeping their cold flame burning at a set level.”
“Explain it so I can understand. Make it super-sized…super-sized simple.”
“What I’m saying is…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke smoothly answered.
He was finally putting together the algorithm as he viewed the true intent hidden in the forest of distractions.
“This is all about a desire for revenge. Isabelle, you can understand that, can’t you?”

Part 6

There was a clinking sound.
A finger in a leather glove had flicked a small piece of metal.
Murasame Kuina, the girl who had made a contract with a demon, pulled an accessory out from the chest of her clothing. Something the size of a coin hung from the thin chain around her neck. The gold-colored cover opened like a pocket watch and she viewed the small photograph inside.
It was not that she felt no guilt.
The pangs of conscience clinging to her soul were not so easily erased.
That was the reason for this ritual.
By reflecting on the smile of someone who had been lost, she could regain control of her feelings. She could make the signal of her emotions entirely flat.
The most important factor when taking revenge was whether or not one could maintain the “initial feeling”.
It was more than just the desire for revenge fading and vanishing.
She would have a change of heart.
The flame would burn just as bright, but its color would change far too easily. If she started working up the funding for pure revenge but ended up focusing on the monetary gain, it would not even make for an amusing story.
She could not make excuses for her revenge.
She had to continue holding revenge up as her goal.
“Biondetta.”
“Yes, ma’am,” gently answered the waitress demon.
That woman was a strange person too. She was Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat. Her greatest characteristic was her intent to “*do whatever it takes to help others with their revenge*”.
“You mentioned it before, but is it true you removed one of your back teeth for that one battle? Can you really keep that up for long?”
“Of course. For one thing, *I do not have a single normal tooth left in my mouth*. So it would be truly foolish to distract yourself from your revenge by worrying about such trivialities.”
The demon showed off her pearly whites with a smile while dumping some pills into her mouth directly from the bottle.
The bare midriff girl gave her a curious look, so Biondetta smiled and said more.
“I can use my Blood-Sign as a sniper rifle, but it isn’t actually one. That means it takes some doing to soften the recoil. Of course, my right arm has more artificial bone than real bone, so it isn’t that difficult to suppress the impact.”
“Then what are those pills for?”
“Due to compatibility issues with the artificial bone, I need to take antibiotics or I will rot from the inside. However, this is still much easier to use than the latest Repliglass.”

The conversation would normally have been frightening, but the girl did not particularly care.
She did not know Biondetta very well and was skeptical of a lot of what the woman said, but she wanted to make use of whatever she could.
All that mattered was wiping out the Anthills.
“The information at the site of the attack revealed the locations of a total of four more Anthills. Do you think that’s all of them?”
“Either way, we need a proper list to check our answers against. But you knew that, didn’t you?”
Biondetta’s tail waved back and forth as she spoke and Murasame Kuina briefly thought on those words.
“Won’t attacking that place so directly take a lot of work?”
“That just means we have to attack it in a more irregular fashion. We do have the item I gave you.”
The waitress demon sounded entirely indifferent.
Her eyes focused on the black glove device on Kuina’s left hand.
“Anyway, wouldn’t it be best to attack the four other Anthills we know of while we wait for some results there? Isn’t it pure torture for you to wait around when you know where your target is, ma’am?”
“…True. I might not be able to wait much longer. I do feel bad making you go along with me, though.”
“Don’t be ridiculous. I could not feel more fulfilled!!”
Biondetta spread her arms as if rejoicing over her life.
“The single word revenge can refer to so many different things. Some complain and complain but never intend to actually do anything about it. Some use their desire for revenge as an excuse to ignore the boundaries between their public and private lives and then indiscriminately indulge in their desire for money and women. Others lose interest after slaughtering a bunch of unrelated people and never actually reach the target of their revenge. …It’s so boring. Oh, it’s just so sad how many people let their desire for revenge transform into something so boring!”
The demon’s list of complaints was likely also a peek into her past.
That was just how many vengeance-seekers she had lent a helping hand to and just how much blood stained her hands.
But your desire for revenge is superb… Yes, and you can trust me here because I am a connoisseur of revenge. You do not let it transform into anything else and you do not allow it to fade away into nothingness! You have managed to maintain your initial desire unchanged!!”
“I don’t care how insane you are, Biondetta.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
“I just want to have my revenge. Once we finish drinking this, let’s go. I can’t bear to wait around. If I know at least one location I can crush, I can’t relax until I do it.”
“Yes! Ma’am!!”

The two of them drank down the rest of their cups of jasmine tea and place them on the saucers.
Then they forcefully stood from their seats.
They were in C Block.
They were in a Chinese restaurant known as a *caiguan*.
It was a relatively cheap restaurant and it was more like a set meal shop.
And…
It was the restaurant that Lu Niang Lan used as an Illegal meeting place.
However, there was currently no sign of anyone there except for at the table where the demon and her client had sat.

Part 7

The bell of the intercom rang through the luxury apartment's living room.
Before Aika could pick up the cordless receiver, she heard the front door click unlocked.
Only two people had a spare key and one of them, Shiroyama Kyousuke, was already in the living room.
"Is that Lu-san?"
Kyousuke's comment was right on the money.
It was the modified China dress beauty who stepped into the living room from the long hallway.
"Now there's two girls' scents invading this shut in girl's final stronghold… Auhhh, I'm feeling faint at this loss of territory. How can the world be so cramped and oppressive? Why does it have to crush even the slightest freedom!?"
"…"
Lu Niang Lan did not respond to the swimsuit girl's confused exclamations.
The modified China dress beauty's head was somewhat lowered as she silently entered the room.
However…
"Ah."
Isabelle, who was closest to her, must have tried to say something, but not even Shiroyama Kyousuke could tell what.
With a surprisingly gentle sound, the Perfect Dragon's fist sank halfway into the center of the military girl's flat chest.
Time seemed to stop.
The fist slowly twisted about ninety degrees while embedded in the girl's chest.

Only after a short delay did a great roar of impact burst from the girl. Even if she was small, she was still a 150cm and 40kg mass, and yet she flew straight across the living room and over the open kitchen's counter. Loud destructive sounds came from the back of the kitchen.
"Isabelle!!"
"You old hag, what do you think you're-…!?"
Aika started to yell at Lu Niang Lan, but her voice was drowned out by the white liger's growl of warning. At some point, the sofa beast had gotten up and moved to protect the swimsuit girl.
Kyousuke belatedly caught on.
He did not think this was a detailed fake of Lu Niang Lan, but something was not right. Her expression and movements were smooth, but the dilation of her eyes was unnatural. It was completely ignoring her surroundings and the light sources.
He could only think of one possibility at the moment.
"Tch!! Girl's Backdoor!?"
"Oh, please!! You're telling me this old hag counts as a girl!?"
As she loudly complained, Aika flipped over the snack box on one corner of the glass table. An egg-shaped Incense Grenade rolled out.
Kyousuke was shocked, but…
"This is no time to wait around! Which gives us a better shot: the liger as-is or the gooey Original series!? Whisper (Then again, she might die either way…)"
Aika pulled the pin and rolled the Incense Grenade at her feet.
Lu Niang Lan did not speak a word.
Nor did she make a mad dash to grab the Incense Grenade and throw it out the window before it detonated.
The Perfect Dragon's outline simply vanished into thin air.
"Wha-…!?"
Aika's target should have been standing right in front of her.
In fact, she most likely was still standing there.
Nevertheless, Aika had lost sight of Lu Niang Lan. The woman had utterly hidden her presence. And the Artificial Sacred Ground *could not be set up if the target could not be seen with the naked eye when the Incense Grenade detonated.*
It did not matter if the target was standing right in front of the summoner. Aika had not even considered the possibility of that failing, so her thoughts ground to a halt. Lu Niang Lan took advantage of that by reappearing in front of her. Her fists and legs were now well within range of the swimsuit girl.
At the same time, the five meter white liger and Shiroyama Kyousuke, who pulled his Blood-Sign from his back, dashed toward Lu Niang Lan from the left and right.

One of them was a ferocious beast with 300kg of weight behind her claws and fangs. The other was a veteran summoner who could run circles around a summoner in the 600s or 700s without even using a Material.
But…
Even so…
“——————”
Lu Niang Lan started by sending a fist toward the leaping white liger’s nose as a cross-counter. With a great roar of impact, the five meter beast fell straight down. This exposed her back to Kyousuke, but the Perfect Dragon did not even look back as his Blood-Sign thrust in like a spear. She twisted around and lowered her upper body, but not to dodge it. She allowed it to rest on her hips and then she used her back to knock it upwards.
“!?”
It pulled Kyousuke’s arms up along with it, leaving his upper body entirely defenseless.
She made a heavy counterattack much like a roundhouse kick and it mercilessly stabbed into his exposed torso.
The impact sounded like a giant drumbeat and Kyousuke flew across the large living room.
Yes.
He took the exact same course as his vessel Isabelle had earlier.
Loud sounds of destruction sounded once he landed.
“Bh!? Cough!!”
(Dammit, I knew it was coming and even lured her into it, but I still couldn’t counteract the full impact!?)
Isabelle had done the same thing. If she had not jumped backwards herself, the impact would likely have wreaked havoc inside her body and caused all of her organs to rupture.
Kyousuke looked around while half buried in the mess that had been a kitchen.
Isabelle had broken through a table and the cabinet door below the sink. He crawled over and slapped her cheek, but she did not respond. She seemed to have a concussion. Even if he used an Incense Grenade, he would not be able to use a Material.
Isabelle and the white liger had both been knocked out of the fight.
Kyousuke and Aika could not use the Summoning Ceremony on their own.
They would have to stop Lu Niang Lan without that.
“…”
Kyousuke awkwardly crawled around the broken kitchen. He knew he had no chance against the Perfect Dragon in hand-to-hand combat. At this range, he was not sure he could win even if he could use an Incense Grenade.
So he did not even think about doing that.
Shiroyama Kyousuke grabbed at the gas range, climbed on top of it, and reached for the gas main behind it. He pulled out the hose and let the gas

escape out past the open kitchen’s counter and into the living room. He released the city gas that contained a unique odor.
No normal attack could hit Lu Niang Lan. No matter what he tried, he would only end up receiving a cross-counter with twice the force behind it.
But that just meant he needed an attack that could not be dodged.
And that meant an attack that would fill the entire room.
“——————”
Lu Niang Lan was quick to respond.
She did not try to stop Kyousuke or take control of the gas main.
As soon as she detected the odor, she kicked over the pen holder on the glass table, kicked up the stainless steel scissors from the office supplies scattered on the floor, and used a double kick to send the scissors flying forward. The scissors stabbed into the distant floor like a knife-throwing trick.
The slight spark blew everything away.
The Perfect Dragon’s plan was as follows: reduce the damage by triggering a smaller explosion before the room fills with gas.
After a bright flash, an explosive noise and shockwave swept across the room.
Only the modified China dress beauty remained standing.
But…

“——————”
After a short delay, water poured down like a sudden burst of rain. It came from the sprinklers on the ceiling.
Lu Niang Lan glanced up but soon looked in a different direction: the kitchen.
Shiroyama Kyousuke slowly got up beyond the open kitchen’s counter.
She was most focused on the power cord to an overloaded power strip he held in his hand. The thick power cords for the refrigerator, microwave, rice cooker, and other appliances were plugged into it. And the boy’s other hand held a knife to the main cord like it was a hostage’s throat.
Kyousuke smiled while soaking wet.
And he did not hesitate.
“Sorry, everyone. Looks like we’re all in this together.”
He cut through the power cable and threw it to the floor.
A bluish-white flash filled a space large enough to hold a tennis match.
Kyousuke, Aika, Isabelle, the white liger, and Lu Niang Lan.
The electrical current struck all of their hearts equally.

Part 8

“Ugh,” groaned Shiroyama Kyousuke on the wet floor.
The sprinklers must have stopped automatically because he was surrounded by silence. The room’s breaker must have tripped because none of the appliances seemed to be functioning.
Isabelle was closest, so he checked her pulse first and then dragged his aching body into the living room. He secured Lu Niang Lan. After checking her pulse as she lay sprawled out on the floor, he used an extension cable to tie up her wrists and ankles.
The room was soaked and the breaker had tripped, but he spotted the light of a tablet on the glass table. That was thanks to its waterproof cover and internal battery. It had received a few emails from Government. One of them was about Girl’s Backdoor, so Kyousuke grabbed the tablet.
The writing was stiff and formal, but he recognized the sender: Government Award 109, Academia. Her real name was Maria Heartocean. She was the top researcher in the field of spiritual damage and the woman he had been tasked with protecting during that midair battle over the Pacific.
She had seemed like a gentle school doctor then, but she was apparently able to display different personalities in different situations. Although

Kyousuke was not sure if the difference was between work and private or between online and real life.

To Official Award 870, Hikikomori.

I am sending you a progress report on the analysis you requested.

I have put off breaking down the black box in the core, so I will begin with what I have discovered through nondestructive tests along the surface of the device.

The Girl's Backdoor behaves much like a device that allows a human target for a vessel's ability to intervene in a Material's mind and take limited control of the Material. The mental capacity of a Material is so much greater than a human's that the vessel can never take complete control, but I estimate a human can take nearly perfect control when the target is another human.

There is still a lot I do not know as to why it only works with young girls, but it may be somehow related to the fact that all Unexplored-class Materials have female forms.

After some clinical trials on recruits within Government, I have revealed a few specific uses and conditions for the Girl's Backdoor.

1: Girl's Backdoor is shaped like a glove and the target is set by wearing it and pointing at the target's face or head.

2: Girl's Backdoor works by inputting data. The target is controlled with tree-style settings that provide a programmed flowchart of what to do when certain things do or do not occur.

3: When inputting the data, the user can move the fingers of the glove to display a keyboard interface in empty air. The flowchart can also be formed as a combination of movements: run, jump, land, etc.

4: When putting together the flowchart, there is no need to start from scratch and mention every little movement of the target's fingers. The user can draw on and use the target's skills and knowledge. For example, telling a chef to cook a meal or telling a safe keeper to open the lock.

5: There are no real risks or dangerous side effects of using Girl's Backdoor.

6: Girl's Backdoor can control up to three people at once. If the user attempts to control a fourth or more, their existing stock will be released in the order at which they were initially controlled.

7: Girl's Backdoor can only control girls and young women between the ages of 10 and 25. The effects continue even if a controlled vessel transforms into a Material.

8: When someone controlled by Girl's Backdoor is released, they lose their memories of being controlled.

9: There are multiple ways for someone controlled by Girl's Backdoor to be released: the user announcing that they are released, the user attempting to control a fourth person, or the controlled person being knocked unconscious.

When Kyousuke saw that knocking someone unconscious would free them from Girl's Backdoor's control, he breathed a small sigh of relief. Tying up

Lu Niang Lan had apparently not been necessary. And since she would lose her memories of being controlled, he had a feeling she would make something of a misunderstanding.
However, that relaxed thought was quickly swept away by what Maria Heartocean wrote next.
I will now address some of my thoughts concerning the application of Girl's Backdoor.
Girl's Backdoor can only control three people at once, but I have revealed that it can spread.
That is, not only can Source X directly control three people, but Source X can control A, A can control B, and B can control C. Of course, a new flowchart tree must be written each time, so it is a lot of effort. Without time for that work, this method is only viable for simple commands.
And in this case, only Source X needs to be equipped with a Girl's Backdoor.
The upper limit of three seems to remain. For example, if Source X controls A, B, and C and then tries to control D via C, the original A will be released.
Also, if it goes from A to B and then B to C, if control of B in the middle is lost because she is knocked out, a chain reaction will cause C to also lose consciousness and be released.
Releasing A would also release B and C in that case, so trying to control a fourth person that way would release all of them.
"……
……"
Kyousuke slowly looked away from the tablet.
There were still two individuals whose pulse he had yet to check.
One was the white liger.
And the other…
"Ai…ka?"
He received no response.
Why had the enemy spreading Girl's Backdoors around the city come to Toy Dream 35 in the first place? If it was only to crush the vessel mass-production facilities known as Anthills, would they have needed to send Lu Niang Lan to attack Aika's apartment?
And if control could spread from Source X to A and from A to B…
Why had Aika passed out?
Because Lu Niang Lan had attacked her? Because of the electrical current Kyousuke had sent out?
And if it was neither of those…
"…"
Kyousuke hesitantly approached Aika.
The collapsed girl held a smartphone in her hand.
The words "Message Sent" danced across the screen.
"What message?"
Shiroyama Kyousuke's voice was quiet.
"And to who!?"

But it quickly grew to a shout.

Part 9

Murasame Kuina snapped her fingers.
She opened the email and attached file sent to her cellphone.
It easily displayed all of the data that had seemed so impossible to find until now.
In other words…
“There are 41 Anthills in all. Now we have all their locations and detailed information on their defenses.”
“Well done, ma’am.”
Now that they knew that, there was no need to hold back.
They could dig in like a wild beast in front of a pile of meat.
The girl of revenge spoke to the demon who lived to fulfill that revenge.
“Let’s go, Biondetta. Let’s destroy them all.”
“Yes, ma’am.”
With that, the two of them silently walked away from a pile of rubble.
It was another of the Anthills they had already discovered. They had created those pitiable ruins with an unconventional method: blowing up the entire location while the summoner was inside her protective circle and the vessel had become a Material.
They moved from Anthill to Anthill and hatred to hatred. They did not seek a moment’s rest as they sought their next target. They were focused on nothing but fulfilling their revenge.

Facts

- During battle, the summoner and vessel cannot leave the Artificial Sacred Ground, but any projectiles can. This is not limited to the Material’s attacks and applies to sniper rifle bullets as well.
- An Artificial Sacred Ground without an enemy is the same as a Chain state, so anyone can join it with no risk. But unlike a Chain

state, the Artificial Sacred Ground does not move with the summoner.

- The Anthills are Government-controlled vessel mass-production facilities and many of them exist. However, a lot is unknown about how they work and the process is risky.
- Girl’s Backdoor makes use of the technique that allows a vessel to interfere with a Material’s mind. A human cannot fully control a Material, but a human can almost perfectly control another human. Using a tree-style command list of what to do when certain conditions are or are not met, the target can semi-automatically fulfill their orders and make decisions. In other words, there is no need to look after every little thing.
- All Unexplored-class Materials are shaped like human girls.
- Murasame Kuina and Biondetta used Lu Niang Lan and Aika to acquire information on all of the Anthills.
- Kuina wishes to have her revenge and Biondetta wishes to help others have their revenge. They have formed a pair known as Liar Cat and their skill is equal to Freedom Award 920.

Stage 03: The Rabbit Guide and the Liar Cat

「チェシャ猫」

「うるせえぞウサギ野郎。私は今気分が良いんだ」

(Stage 03 Open 05/23 16:00)

ステージ03

案内人のウサギと嘘つきのネコ

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Cheshire Cat.”
“Shut up, you damn rabbit. I’m in a good mood right now.”
(Stage 03 Open 05/23 16:00)
The Rabbit Guide and the Liar Cat

Part 1

“Nn…”
Lu Niang Lan, the modified China dress beauty, breathed a sultry sigh from her scarlet lips.
She quickly realized she had been tossed onto the wooden floor with her arms and legs bound behind her.
“Huh? I’m all wet and see-through.”
She looked down at her chest which was swelling out even more than usual due to the arched back of her pose. The fabric was unpleasantly clinging to her skin somewhat and she could not move her arms or legs.
“I’m tied up!?”
Finally realizing the gravity of the situation, she looked around.
“Wait a second… I was in C Block’s Hai Hong Caiguan, so why am I in a Government apartment now?”
The floor was wet.
However, the government dog named Aika as well as Shiroyama Kyousuke, Isabelle, and even the white liger were looking down at her with exasperated looks.
“K-Kyousuke-chan? Can you explain what’s going on? You haven’t broken our unspoken understanding by selling me off to Government, have you!?”
Still confused, Lu Niang Lan suggested the worst possibility she could think of.
But when Kyousuke and Aika exchanged a glance, their expressions were even graver than that.
“Onii-chan, what should we do about this?”
“When you’re released from Girl’s Backdoor, you apparently lose your memories of being controlled, so I’m not sure there’s anything we can do.”
“Ehh!? You mean she gets off scot-free!? I refuse to accept that! This old hag gave us a whole lot of trouble!!”
“My chest still hurts. Somewhere between medium-sized and large-sized. Throb throb(deadpan).”
“C’mon. She didn’t actually do anything wrong here, so let’s leave it at this.”

“???”
Lu Niang Lan was clearly baffled by their exchange, but they ignored her. They had something else to focus on.
The tablet produced the sound of an incoming video chat call.
Aika sat on the wet floor and tried to use the white liger as a sofa like usual, but the beast slipped out from under her. The five meter pet rejected Aika and the girl flipped over on the floor. The white liger may not have wanted to lie on the wet floor, but she also seemed to be having trouble relaxing after the Perfect Dragon’s rampage. Animals were fiercest when they were afraid, not when they had the advantage.
“Ahh! Onii-chan, go grab that baby bottle. I’ll win this stubborn liger over with a stomach full of milk!!”
“Don’t. Give her anymore and you’ll make her sick.”
“But that spoiled liger almost always goes right to sleep if you give her some warm milk. That old hag’s sacks of fat must have really scared her…”
“I don’t blame her. Zuuun(deadpan). I think I’ll be having some medium-sized nightmares…”
“Aika. You were controlled too, so don’t forget that attacking her is the same as attacking yourself.”
Aika pouted her lips and grabbed the tablet from the glass table while still lying on the floor.
She answered the call and a woman in a military uniform filled the screen. However, hers was much more subdued than Isabelle’s. It had a dark blue base, she wore pants instead of a tight skirt, and she lacked the black belts that acted as restraints. Instead, she had plenty of decorative medals.
She was a Government coordinator.
Or perhaps she could be called a planner or a troubleshooter.
Regardless, she was sent in to build a new plan when something failed inside their organization. She would also make alternate suggestions to minimize the damage. Overall, she was a bureaucratic specialist.
“We have finished regulating the data and updating our plans,” she said.
“Might I get back on topic?”
“Yes.”
“Currently, we have two primary problems. First, all information related to the Anthills has been passed to the enemy summoner. Second, that apartment where Government, Illegal, and Freedom meet was abused to pull it off. …Unfortunately, most of the higher ups are viewing the second problem as the more serious one. Although if they feel they can calmly think about punishment now, I have to wonder if they believe no bullet could reach their heads even on the front line.”
“Just to be clear, that Illegal old hag was being controlled by Girl’s Backdoor, so she had no control over her actions.”
“That is not all that relevant.” The coordinator gave a light sigh. “The problem is that the information would not have been leaked if you not been on such good terms with an Illegal assassin and if that contact point did not

exist. I cannot cover for you here. If you have a complaint, bring it to the higher ups."
"…"
"And while it was Lu Niang Lan who went on a rampage, it was you who leaked the classified information with your mobile phone, Aika. Thanks to that, two additional Anthills have been attacked. The valuable research data and precious lives there have been lost. Do not think this does not apply to you. You played a primary role."
She made it sound like Girl's Backdoor did not exist and Lu Niang Lan and Aika had simply conspired to leak the classified information.
Isabelle spoke to Kyousuke as she listened in.
"Nuuun(deadpan). This is small-sized irritating."
"Oh, what a coincidence. It's pissing me off a fair bit too."
"You are part of this too, Alice (with) Rabbit." The coordinator winked and tapped her temple with her index finger. "With the suspicion on Aika and Lu Niang Lan, they are a step away from disaster. If you wish to remove them from the list of possible executions, you must take on a share of their debt even if there is no suspicion on you directly. This is especially important to silence the higher ups who have never liked that apartment where all three major powers gather."
"Oh? That's quite the compromise. Could you not get at me without asking first?"
"This isn't much different. Freedom Award 903, we will receive your help free of charge. We will send you to our fiercest battlefield at the moment. Refuse and we will add those two to the official list of wanted criminals. The world will bear its fangs against them and they will essentially be sent to the gallows."
"Get to the specifics."
"The data Aika leaked could not have been worse. It included the locations of the Anthills, the personnel, the funding routes, the equipment procurement routes, the defense forces, and the emergency evacuation routes. Two bases have already been destroyed using that data. We do not intend to lose any more of the research equipment, personnel, and research results that the higher ups paid large sums of money for. …*Simply put, we are evacuating*."
When he heard that word, Kyousuke brought a hand to his forehead and looked up at the ceiling.
Isabelle tilted her head next to him.
"Mh? I'm not even small-sized sure why that's so bad."
"It's really bad. By the way, how many Anthills are still functioning?"
"34."
"And how many people are inside?"
"Assume there are around one hundred in each."
"You want to evacuate all of them from Toy Dream 35 at once? Using every route available, be it land, air, or sea? *How are you going to protect them*

all? Liar Cat can use all of the information they got using Aika. If they have all your evacuation routes, they can attack you whenever and wherever they want."
An amateur might think they could quickly create a new route, but that would not work. If it was that easy, they would not bother to create routes in advance. They needed packages, bodyguards, knowledge of possible attack points, a secondary route in case they were attacked, a tertiary route, an idea of where they could find safety, and a second and third shelter in case the first was compromised. Working it all out on paper took a week and not even a month was enough to confirm that it was indeed a valid route. And instead of getting a VIP or two out, this was sending around three thousand personnel in every direction.
And just because they could not do it did not mean they could sit around thinking about it. Even if they tried to barricade themselves where they were, Liar Cat was above Freedom Award 900, so that summoner would mercilessly crush the Anthill Project along with those bases.
Simply put, they were cornered.
"The higher ups have a plan." The coordinator began grinding her index finger against her temple. "They will prepare a great number of transport groups, including decoys and then have them all simultaneously evacuate Toy Dream 35 in every direction. Even if our enemy has 900 level skill, they are only a single pair. A few of the transport groups might get hit, but Liar Cat will not reach the real one. …What do you think of that?"
"But *that was part of the information they have now, wasn't it?* We aren't choosing the target; Liar Cat is. It's all over if they snack on a few of them and then get to the real one before the limit arrives," said Kyousuke. "Not to mention that Liar Cat will almost certainly maintain their Material's cost as much as possible by continuing the fight with Chains. If they can build up through the Regulation-class and Divine-class to reach the Unexplored-class, they'll charge into the enemy forces at their most powerful. …But I doubt they can always reach the next target in the 90 seconds given. What do you think they'll do then? We're talking about Liar Cat who gave out Girl's Backdoors for civilians to use as nothing more than a disturbance tactic."
"Nuuun(deadpan). So if their Chain isn't going to last, they'll attack normal people to keep their super-sized Chain going?"
Kyousuke nodded at Red Hat Isabelle's question.
"And they'll be cutting back and forth across the city to pursue the transportation groups scattering in every direction. Toy Dream 35 won't just be filled with pools of blood; the entire city will collapse."
"But I doubt the higher ups will change their minds so easily. Or rather, it is hard to stop a giant cannonball once it has started to roll. If you wish to reduce the damage done, your only option is defeating the summoner pair as soon as possible."

“But if Liar Cat’s possible targets are scattered everywhere, we can’t exactly lie in wait.”
“Meaning?”
“If we narrow down their targets to just one place, we know exactly where Liar Cat will show up. What are the most important personnel and resources among the Anthills? If you keep everything else as-is but try to evacuate them ahead of time, Liar Cat will definitely take the bait. We can beat them down there.”
“Even if they know it is a trap?”
“That type can’t resist the taste of revenge.”
The coordinator sighed.
A slight shadow or waver seemed to enter her previous stiffness.
“But the higher ups will never accept it. They truly believe that they are protecting themselves by refusing to admit to their own mistakes. If they know that such a risky method was suggested by an outsider, I seriously doubt they will change their evacuation plan.”
“You sound troubled.”
Kyousuke smiled thinly.
Their plan had already failed and 3000 lives depended on its success. Despite her overbearing behavior, this woman could not have enjoyed having this forced onto her.
“Do you have a suggestion?”
“It sounds like Government’s higher ups don’t understand the danger they’re in. They must truly believe that they can settle this by shoving responsibility onto someone else, that the problem only exists on paper, and that no physical flames are going to rain down on them. So how about I remind them? I’m willing to play the thankless job of the bitter medicine.”
“Very well.”
It was now the coordinator’s turn to look up toward heaven.
She had apparently heard the legends of Alice (with) Rabbit, but her pride may have prevented her from actually speaking the words.
But she shook free of that and verbally raised the white flag.
“I would appreciate it if you would help us. I mean it.”

Part 2

Apartments came in many different shapes and sizes, but this one was a one-room apartment for university students. The front door led directly into the room and the newspaper slot carelessly installed in the door would

allow anyone to peep on the room if they wanted. That made changing clothes a daily challenge, but it was still an attractive residence for its relatively affordable price in the amusement park city of Toy Dream 35. Despite the poor customer service, there were no vacancies in May, which was past the season for beginning a new life.
Steam rose from the kettle.
Biondetta, the demon in a pink waitress uniform, hummed to herself as she prepared some tea. She removed her white lace glove to manipulate the tools with her slender fingers.
“Ma’am.”
“Hm?”
Murasame Kuina, her client and vessel, blankly replied while sitting on the pastel colored bed with her knees in her arms.
“To be honest, I don’t know much about tea,” said the girl. “I’ve only ever had it from a bottle. So don’t bother talking on and on about it.”
“Not to worry. This is a blend.”
“Hm?”
“The Summoning Ceremony battles are mentally exhausting, so I have combined a few different types of tea leaves to provide a calming effect. As long as you know how to make it, standard store-bought teas are good enough. Yes, just like a clever usage of cold medicine and allergy medicine can create a sleazy drug that will put an innocent young girl fast asleep.”
“I don’t want to hear that from a woman who takes antibiotics by the handful… And isn’t caffeine a stimulant?”
“There are a number of ways to use it. Most summoners either have a special supplier or mix their own Incense Grenades, so we tend to be quite skilled at this sort of work.”
A student apartment did not come equipped with the kind of tea set used for the British royal family, but Biondetta used tools likely bought at a 100 yen shop for makeshift replacements. And she had done more than memorize the manual. She had broken it down and built it back up to absorb as much knowledge as possible.
Midriff Girl Kuina fidgeted on the bed.
“Did I ask you to do this? I thought our contract only said you would help me get revenge for Sayuri.”
“And I will provide everything necessary for you to truly enjoy your revenge. It would all be for naught if you were too sleep deprived to savor the taste of revenge when the time came. If you like, I could climb in bed with you to sing a lullaby, I could join you in the bath, or I could try my hand at providing a massage.”
“No, thanks.”
Kuina got down from the bed and sat at the glass table in the center of the small room.
She sipped at the tea poured into a plastic mug, but…
“I really can’t tell any difference.”

“I appreciate the honesty more than pretending you know what you are talking about, ma’am.”
“But I have no intention of taking a nap. I’m too on edge to fall asleep. The core of my body is telling me I have to hurry up and get out there…hurry up and kill.”
“I would expect nothing less from my client. And that is why I prepared this as a type of inflight refueling.”
Murasame Kuina had trouble judging what the smiling demon was truly after.
Normally thinking, helping a stranger with their revenge came with enormous risk. Not only was there direct combat, but it meant making an enemy of everyone around the target and, if they could not earn their partner’s trust, it was possible they could be stabbed in the back. Plus, revenge tended to end in failure after being outnumbered and the enemy would not forgive them if they said “never mind” at that point.
Nevertheless, Biondetta chose to take part.
She gained nothing from it. She had no enemy in common with her client. This revenge only had any meaning for Murasame Kuina. Even if it succeeded, Biondetta would not gain anything at all from the violence.
It was almost like a reckless surfer heading to the beach on a stormy night despite the danger.
She was losing herself in the act itself. It was the madness of someone taking a hobby much too far.
“Biondetta.”
“What is it?”
“I don’t know your situation. I don’t care if you’re secretly benefiting from this, if someone else hired you to do this, or if you’re acting as a double spy and all my information is fed right back to Government.”
She narrowed her eyes and shook around the contents of the mug a little.
“All that matters is that it helps me with my revenge *in the end*. I’m even fine with dying after the fact. So let’s go over the basics again, Biondetta. Help me with my revenge. It doesn’t matter if you’re my enemy or my ally.”
“Yes. I am delighted to hear that, ma’am.”
The pink waitress demon gave a smile that was far too rotten to call charming.
“I do not often meet someone who expresses that with her actions and not just her words, but you seem to be different. I am relieved.”
“Hmph.”
Murasame Kuina must have had trouble with hot drinks because she only took small sips at the mug.
Once it was empty, she set it on the table and stood up.
“What’s our next move, Biondetta?”
“Well, how about we go for something that is half for peace of mind and half pure harassment? They’ve probably noticed us by now. And they will know about these clothes.”

As she spoke, Biondetta pinched the sides of her waitress skirt and waved it around.
“I brought in an entire container’s worth as part of the costume event, so I was thinking we could spread some money around to hire hundreds of people to walk around dressed like this.”
“How can you hire people when summoners and vessels vanish from people’s minds?”
“We can use an intermediary by way of your Girl’s Backdoor.”
“I can only control three people. Is this really worth using up that stock?”
“If we no longer need it, we can remove them from our control. And Government is sure to think that the decoys might be manipulated by Girl’s Backdoor and thus could make indiscriminate terrorist attacks. As the world police, they cannot ignore that and will have to waste some of their personnel on them. Meanwhile, we can take advantage of our freedom.”
“So when you get down to it, you don’t know how effective it will be?”
“As I said, it’s half for peace of mind and half pure harassment, ma’am. Anyone with any sense will catch on immediately, but it will still allow us to rest easy. The trick to enjoying revenge is to add some fun into the efficiency☆”
“Hmph,” snorted Murasame Kuina.
She nodded to give her approval and then spoke.
“Then are you ready to go?”
“Yes, ma’am. I am ready to go anywhere you want.”
Despite the care she took in preparing the tea, she apparently had no intention of cleaning it up.
There was a simple reason for that.
As soon as the two of them stood up, something shook in a corner of the room. The figure lying on the wooden flooring had two arms, two legs, and long black hair that spread out like seaweed to hide the face.
It was the owner of the room.
The college girl had been controlled by Girl’s Backdoor and given a flowchart with only one instruction: curl up in the corner.

Part 3

Miyama Gouta was a man in his prime who would turn fifty this year.
He was a soldier who had never once set foot on the battlefield and yet the chest of his deep blue military uniform glittered with a great quantity of medals. He stood inside one of Government’s Anthills.

A number of conditions were necessary to construct an Anthill, but the most important was a facility that functioned as a miniature model of society. It could be any number of things: a school, a hospital, a prison, a military base, a casino, a theatre, a hotel, a prep school, etc. Any relatively closed facility that managed a group under a single system could be remade into an Anthill.
That meant Miyama was inside one such facility.
It was A Block's international airport.
"What? Are you still falling behind on preparing for the evacuation operation? We're pressed for time, so finish as scheduled no matter what it takes! I don't care about trivial safety management! We need to focus on ensuring the core of the Anthill escapes!! Use your head, you fool!! They may be bloodthirsty murderers, but their skill is at Freedom's 900 level. Do I really have to tell you that losing our valuable research results in an indiscriminate attack is simply unacceptable!?"
There was not the slightest doubt on his face as he shouted angrily into a cellphone. He truly believed that the scales of good or evil were entirely dependent on whether or not whatever it was would allow the entire project – *including himself* – to escape safely.
"Listen. Do not delay this evacuation operation even by a single second. I don't care if it's a hangnail or a mouth ulcer; even the slightest loss or damage is your responsibility. If you get that, then get those hands working! Yes, your hands! We don't need your mouth or your brain!!"
The airport's floorplan looked quite open, but it was cleverly designed so a full two-thirds of its space was off limits. Miyama Gouta swaggered past the strict defenses, ignored the guards who made sure to salute, and knocked on a waiting room door.
His expression made a complete about-face.
The middle-aged military officer put on an almost creepily bright smile and spoke sweetly to the young woman lounging on the sofa.
He spoke to the researcher who was a central member of the Anthill.
"I am so very sorry, Miss Heartocean. Our schedule has been delayed due to inclement weather. Once the conditions clear up, we can take off immediately."
"Anything's fine with me as long as you let me continue my research."
Maria Heartocean did not bother looking in the soldier's direction and stared at the back of her hand and her fingernails instead.
Miyama's right temple twitched disconcertingly, but he managed to respond with a smile.
"Is there anything else you lack?"
"Everything."
Maria said that with no hint of sarcasm. She made it sound like *that was simply the truth.*
She seemed to be displaying the colors of Government, the world police.

“I’d especially like for you to do something about the internet connection. I mean, nothing but Wi-Fi and only two antennae? Is that supposed to be a joke? Humans have a limited lifespan, so wasting time like this could lead to missing a major discovery. And can you take responsibility if that happens? How?”
“I will arrange for it right away. I was given strict orders to give you the best hospitality possible, Miss Heartocean.”
“Also, does this violate the safety standards?”
Maria pointed straight ahead.
This was the strictly guarded off-limits zone of an international airport.
This was an important Government base.
This was the core of an Anthill.
Nevertheless, a large knife was stabbed vertically into the cushion of the two-person leather sofa across from Maria Heartocean.
“A boy wandered in here earlier and did that, but I’m not too familiar with the local slang. Do you think it’s some kind of message?”
“Impossible…”
Miyama froze up for a moment, unable to believe what he was seeing.
Someone had carried a blade into the same room as their top priority personnel. And no one had noticed. It was just as unreasonable as finding unidentified fingerprints all over the inside of a nuclear weapons vault.
“Impossible!? Who!? How!?”
His extensive knowledge of the usual security setup robbed this feat of all reality.
He was utterly confused and turned toward the door to call for his men.
That was when Miyama Gouta saw it.
“Hi. Would you have preferred a box of chocolates?”
Alice (with) Rabbit spoke calmly with his arms folded and his back resting against the door.
“…!?”
The military officer was shocked speechless and Maria gave a casual wave.
“Yahoo. Now that I think about it, you’re still borrowing Isabelle, aren’t you? How’s she doing? Are you using her well?”
“At the very least, I’m treating her with more humanity than any of you did. I’m not entirely sure I should give her back.”
“Ah ha ha. Yeah, I guess you would figure that out. That isn’t good…”
After that quick exchange, Kyousuke turned back toward Miyama Gouta.
“Just as a warning, we didn’t use an Incense Grenade to get in. We simply used the fact that people forget all about summoners and vessels as soon as they look away. Do you get what that means?”
“Heh hehn(deadpan). I already super-sized get it.”
“That’s great, Isabelle, but I don’t think he understands just how serious the situation is yet. …And even if there’s a big event in the city, it’s probably not a good idea to have the airport workers wear costumes too. Their uniforms act as something like an ID.”

“Wha-…wha-…?”
Miyama seemed to finally remember how to breathe.
He saw Maria lightly waving at Kyousuke and realized they had gone over his head. The dirty reality of authority and hierarchy dragged his mind back to the colorful world.
He had been humiliated here.
To anyone with bureaucratic power, that felt more damaging than being stabbed with an actual knife.
“What are those lowly hired hands doiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiing!?”
“It might be unofficial, but you’re the man in charge here and yet you fell for it more than anyone.”
Kyousuke did not bat an eye as the man stepped closer.
They glared at each other from only a few centimeters apart.
“Listen. If I can do this, then someone else can too. Just to be clear, expert assassins are a lot better at this sort of job than expert bodyguards. …Liar Cat will go even further. Once you understand that, rethink everything you’re doing here. They’re Freedom Award 920. That’s higher than 903.”
“Don’t you talk down to me! Do you have any idea who I am!?”
“Good question. Who were you again?” Kyousuke continued leaning against the door. “Were you the optimist who honestly believes bullets will magically avoid him? Or maybe you were the narrow-minded fool who has lost sight of the approaching threat because he’s so busy figuring out how to corner Aika since he hates her so much? No, maybe you were the coward who was willing to abandon all 3000 of his men just to get the last seat on the ark. …People’s reputations are just like summoner names; they’re chosen by the people around them. So what does that make you?”
“You…!! You dare criticize me while ignoring your own failure!?”
“We were after Girl’s Backdoor in the first place. Without Aika and Lu-san’s help, the initial diversion plan would have caused much more damage. Plus, the targets would all have been innocent civilian girls. And let’s not forget that we didn’t keep what we learned to ourselves. We sent Government detailed reports including sample Girl’s Backdoors. Although the only people who did anything useful with that information were Aika and Academia here. You didn’t put together any kind of plan, you ignored the threat to civilians, and then when your precious world police were attacked, you shove all the blame onto us? Didn’t I tell you that people don’t get to choose their own reputation? That’s up to the people around them.”
Kyousuke pointed to the other side of the room with his chin.
The military officer hesitantly turned around in time to hear a relaxed comment from Maria Heartocean who was looking at her fingernails on the sofa.
“To be honest, I don’t really care either way.”
“M-Miss Heartocean…?”
“But Alice (with) Rabbit did a pretty good job of proving that I’m just waiting around to be killed under the current system. I’m not sure I like the

sound of that. I can't stop wondering why I should even listen to you when I can tell you're going to fail."
His career was dead in the water.
That simple fact burned through the last thread of rationality in the military officer's head.
"I-I'll kill you. I'll beat you to death, you damn brat!!"
"Yes, yes. Thanks for playing."
As the military officer tried to grab him, Kyousuke slammed the man's face against the door, knocking him out in a single blow. Then he spoke indifferently.
"Now you won't have to lose your life in your reckless evacuation operation, so I hope you're at least a little thankful."
"Nuuun(deadpan). I don't think there's even a small-sized chance of that."
Kyousuke showed no respect for the organization or the slightest courtesy while intruding on someone else's territory. It was true Aika and Lu Niang Lan had made a mistake, but he was essentially forcing Government to overlook it by threatening them. From beginning to end, he selfishly prioritized his own feelings, so he could never function properly in an organization.
But.
That was exactly why Shiroyama Kyousuke belonged to Freedom rather than Government or Illegal.
Those who praised freedom above all else and hated any kind of restrictions would meet some level of resistance from society. But some of those people would force through it with their own strength and those were the people who had naturally gathered together and built a loose framework around themselves.
In that way, he was the same as Liar Cat.
If he was to take advantage of those traits, he had to understand them.
"So." Maria looked away from her fingernails and asked a question. "What should I do now?"
"If you want a 100% chance of death, feel free to continue with Government's plan. If you would prefer something risky but with a chance of survival, then help us."
Kyousuke explained the counter-proposal they had come up with. It would minimize the damage and ensure they could predict and intercept Liar Cat's attack. There was only one enemy pair, so even if it was risky, there was nothing to fear once that pair was defeated. To do that, they had to drag the most important piece of the Anthill Project – Maria – to the front line as bait. All other personnel and equipment would remain on standby. There would be no diversions or body doubles. By bringing the biggest target out in just the one place, Liar Cat would definitely take the bait, knowing full it was a trap. And when they knew the attack was coming, it would be easy to fight back.

In a way, the plan would show its effects much more quickly. But it was also like throwing the president out onto the battlefield alone to draw out the guerillas or terrorists. The king in shogi had nothing on the underside because it was assumed the king itself would not move out to the enemy side of the board to be promoted. It was a plan that the Government world police could never agree to.
But…
“That’s fine.”
It barely sounded like Maria Heartocean had even thought about her answer.
In fact, she so casually threw out Government’s standard assumptions that Kyousuke was a little worried that she had not even considered the fact that this was her life they were talking about.
“I never really cared who was handling the evacuation operation’s security or how they were doing it. As long as a product works, who cares who made it? *As long as you have no reason to worry about its quality, that is.*”
She was implying that the military officer collapsed on the floor had been inadequate.
Isabelle tilted her head.
“I’m medium-sized worried whether everyone will accept this.”
“Don’t worry, don’t worry. Government is all about the vertical divides, so they have to obey no matter how selfish the people above them get.”
Maria laughed.
“And I bet no one really wanted to be the sacrifice to let some VIPs escape safely. They’ll probably breathe a sigh of relief when they hear that farce has been called off. Especially when the replacement plan lets them get back at Liar Cat.”
She waved her hand.
“Also, Aika-chan’s pretty popular around here. From what I’ve heard, she really looks after people in her middleman job, so she never leaves a summoner stuck in the middle of the battlefield and she acts as a buffer with Illegal and Freedom which helps them avoid needless killing. There must have been a lot of people with a hidden dislike of how all the blame was being shoved onto her. If we give a small push in the right direction, things will change a lot easier than you think.”

“Then let’s do that. I’d appreciate it if you contacted us once those adjustments are complete.”
“Oh? You’re going to look after me to the end?”
“No matter how it happened, I do feel responsible for the leaked information ‘in my own way’.”
“Are you sure it isn’t about Liar Cat?”
“…”
Shiroyama Kyousuke briefly fell silent at her smooth reply.
There was no real sarcasm or irony in Maria Heartocean’s voice. She was simply *stating the facts* with a boldness unique to Government.
“Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat. An unusual summoner who binds a contract with her client and thoroughly supports their revenge. For that reason, her vessel changes every time and can be seen as identical to her client. …Don’t forget that we are Government. We’re going to do our research on the enemy trying to take a bite out of us.”
And Maria continued.
“That means the summoner is in charge. Or rather, her beliefs and specs form Liar Cat’s identity. Which leads me to a very, very, verrrry interesting fact about this summoner named Biondetta.”
She laughed.
“Apparently, her full name is Biondetta Shiroyama. Interesting, no?”

Part 4

Shiroyama Kyousuke temporarily parted ways with his vessel Isabelle.
Toy Dream 35’s P Block contained a lot of parks and sports fields and the rooftops were being proactively covered in greenery. Kyousuke was in one of the parks there. The artificial land was as large as a soccer field and it was forcibly supported fifty meters in the air with somewhere between a few dozen and over a hundred pillars. Although the park looked more like a café terrace thanks to the chain café there.
The short grass was dyed orange by the setting sun.
Thanks to the Delayed Walpurgis, people dressed as Snow White or Little Red Riding Hood were sitting at the large rectangular tables and chatting over coffee or tea. The tables had a billiards motif and it looked like the game could actually be played on them, but with all the water drops and stains, they did not look suitable for an official game.
With all the costumes everywhere, a normal hoodie stood out.
And he had been fully aware of that fact when he came here.

Kyousuke was casually enjoying a saccharine new product with honey, milk, cinnamon, and who knows what else inside an iced coffee. His left hand felt itchy in the leather glove.
Before he could even remove the ice cubes from the transparent cup, the demon arrived.
In this city's twisted sense of "normal", the demon was able to blend in more than him.
"May I sit here?"
"Sure."
The demon in a pink waitress uniform sat across from Kyousuke before he even answered.
She placed her cup, a mille crepe on a small plate, and a bottle of antibiotics on the edge of the table.
"You were waiting for me. How did you know I would be here?"
"To be honest, I had been keeping tabs on that Murasame Kuina you're using as a vessel. I wasn't able to put together an algorithm since I didn't know who she was working with, but then Government contacted me. … They said the infamous Liar Cat had destroyed the Anthill in D Block."
"Oh, my."
"The rest was easy. One: The *Cheshire Cat* likes to watch the evening scenery from an elevated place. Two: The *Cheshire Cat* cannot go three days without honey and cream. Three: The *Cheshire Cat* practices hitting balls for two hours a day to hone her fingers and ensure she does not forget that feeling. You would have begun to relax now that you had all the Anthill information you needed thanks to Aika. I figured you would want to increase your efficiency by intentionally taking some time to relax before getting to work, just like the Spanish siesta."
"You don't have to call me that every single time, *you damn rabbit*."
"…"
"…"
The atmosphere grew so tense they could almost hear the sound of cracking glass.
But then Kyousuke saw a nearby costumed café worker go pale as if overcome by sudden hyperventilation and the waitress demon took a bite of her mille crepe, so they both relaxed for their own reasons.
Time seemed to move once more, the oppressive sense of heavy glass left, and a normal atmosphere returned. The part-time worker in an orange pumpkin-style uniform quickly left.
"Anyway."
The waitress demon smiled and clacked together the equipment next to her. One was a strange Blood-Sign. A silver pipe was bent in two with a leather belt wrapped around it and a disposable handle carelessly attached to the side.
The other was a bolt-action sniper rifle that used 7.62mm rounds.

“I was fully aware of the danger, so I laid a trap. Didn’t you think I might start by sniping you even if I did come here?”
“I know *you* can read my algorithm to a certain extent.”
“You have your vessel positioned at the most likely spot, don’t you? So while I was lying there preparing to take the shot, she could take advantage of my narrowed focus and field of vision by hitting me over the back of the head.”
The demon took a sip of her tea and glanced to a different building’s rooftop.
Her vessel was not here either. She had laid a trap for his trap. In the end, their ideas may have been quite similar.
“But the Summoning Ceremony industry is surprisingly small. It seemed like some kind of mistake that we escaped that miniature garden 500 meters belowground, but here we are butting heads again.”
“*You* still haven’t really escaped that place.”
“Please, call me Detta. And is it really that surprising?”
Kyousuke narrowed his eyes as he watched Biondetta pour the antibiotics into her mouth straight from the bottle.
“A summoner that binds a contract to help people with their revenge? No, what *you’re* doing is different. You want to take revenge and you can’t forgive yourself, so you’re forcing those words out of other people’s mouths.”
“Hee hee hee! You’re one to talk, boy. I’m no different from you.”
“…”
“You help people because you hear the cursed words of ‘help me’? You don’t really want to do it? Don’t make me laugh. When you get down to it, you want to save them and you can’t forgive yourself, so you force those words out of other people’s mouths. We’re not so different. *We want to do it, so we create a system that allows us to do it.* Am I wrong?”
Salvation and revenge.
They stood at complete opposite positions, but this strange pair both saw what they were doing as “helping” people.
And they were both at the 900 level, so they had the incredible power needed to fulfill that request.
“No, I’m not like *you*. I really do want to wash my hands of all this.”
“You say that, but the second you hear those cursed words, you’ll jump right back in.”
“It is true that half the world’s problems might be my fault,” said Kyousuke to cut her off and drown her out.
A thick and hopeless darkness filled the depths of his eyes.
“But I also think it might be for the best if I stay out of it and don’t get involved. Taking responsibility is my own selfish desire and the world might be left with shallower wounds if I give up instead of making such poor attempts at a solution.”
“And leave the White Queen to do whatever she wants? When no one but you can even speak with her?”

“——————”
“See? That changed the look on your face. You can’t escape this industry, boy. No matter what you say or think, there’s nothing you can do when it has influenced your very soul.”
“Cheshire Cat.”
“Shut up, *you damn rabbit*. I’m in a good mood right now.”
The reclaimed atmosphere ground to a halt once more, as if the world’s gears had jammed. The air of death that expanded did not allow the average person to even breathe adequately.
“Either way, I will not quit my revenge. Just like you and your addiction to saving people.”
“No matter what?”
“Yes, of course. That Fifteen Siblings Project held in the Queen’s Miniature Garden was quite the sinful project, but don’t you find it a fascinating sign that its products – that is, us – are involved in this incident?”
A closed miniature garden.
A facility that managed a certain number of people with a single social system and maintained a certain level of secrecy.
Fifteen people of different nationalities, religions, races, and sexes had been gathered together.
The project had been meant to thoroughly analyze familial and sibling bonds.
They wanted to make the planet one giant family.
But not as a mere ideology. In that grand farce, they had hoped to implant those bonds in all of humanity on the level of brain structure. They had truly believed that would act as the ultimate safety device that would bring an end to all conflict around the world.
To determine the effects under the harshest conditions the world had to offer, extreme environments had been artificially created using the greatest Materials of the Summoning Ceremony and the research data on them.
And this had produced…
“If you’re talking about the Anthills, you’re way off the mark.”
“But the sequence of events suggests that those were created based on data obtained from the wreckage of the Queen’s Miniature Garden. Of course, they never moved past the surface level and never even approached its true essence, but if they had, *they would have gone far beyond simply mass-producing vessels, don’t you think?*”
“Half of the fifteen died in that war and the other half reached the 900 level. Just as an honest question, do you really think that was all thanks to the ‘lessons’ there?”
“It’s impossible to know for sure at this point. But personally, I think it had more to do with our careless contact with the Queen. But I can’t even be sure of that. The Queen might see it in reverse. I get the feeling she would point at you and insist it was all her brother’s doing.”
“…”

It had not failed.
They had simply failed to predict what would happen once it succeeded.
“So you’re saying an incomplete Fifteen Siblings Project was turned into a vessel mass-production project?”
“If so, we have the right to tear it down since that project messed with our lives. *I have a reason to take revenge and an excuse that justifies my doing so.* Isn’t that exciting?”
Why had no one realized the truth?
It was true that certain kinds of love and affection might develop between families and siblings.
But it was not restricted to that.
For example, the death of any one of humanity’s seven billion people would bring the same shock as losing a close relative. So could anyone maintain their sanity when people died on a daily basis?
For example, there were feelings fostered by sibling bonds beyond love and affection…such as hatred. If that intimate hatred covered the world, wouldn’t the subsequent destruction be far deeper rooted than with normal negative emotions?
“How did this happen?” asked Kyousuke without expecting an answer. “A lot happened in the Queen’s Miniature Garden, but not all of the fifteen arrived on the same path as *you*. *Cheshire Cat*, what did *you* see there? How did you end up like this?”
“Shut the hell up, *you damn rabbit*. You’re the one that completed your Sewn Realm Summoning during the Fifteen Siblings Project. That stabilized the White Queen and allowed us all to view her from different angles. It may have been the Queen’s fear, the Queen’s passion, the Queen’s violence, or the Queen’s allure.”
The waitress demon counted on her fingers as she spoke.
And then…
“But you were the only one to see the Queen’s love. You’re the one I have a question for, *you damn rabbit*. How did you manage to keep your sanity? After seeing that incarnation of destruction, how were you able to accept the Queen? What did you learn about her that would allow you to even consider that possibility?”
“Accept…?”
Shiroyama Kyousuke’s mind went blank.
Unable to understand, he repeated the words as if throwing them back at her.
“You’re saying I’ve…accepted the White Queen?”
“Of course.” The demon smiled while pointing right at the boy’s nose. “I seek revenge because – no matter how nauseatingly disgusting I find it – the very roots of my soul were influenced by the Queen’s hatred I saw back then. Similarly…”
Oh, no, thought Kyousuke.

He could not let himself hear this. Because they knew each other so well, these fatal words would pierce straight through his heart's defenses.
"Your 'help me' syndrome is a role the powerful White Queen was supposed to play, isn't it? She is summoned because people seek her, she fights because she is called upon, she saves every last life through absolute victory, and even the enemy bows down to her after the battle. She is supposed to be a saint who saves two hundred when trying to save one hundred. …How can you snuggle up with the Queen with that refreshed look on your face? It's just plain creepy."
His mind fell into darkness.

Part 5

Atop another building in P Block, another confrontation was underway among the greenery growing on the square rooftop.
It looked like a scene from a costume party.
Isabelle had been waiting on that building in case a sniper targeted Kyousuke during his meeting with Biondetta. When taking into account line of fire, wind direction, the layout of the buildings, the flow of the crowds, the location of the sun, etc., there were relatively few good sniper spots even in a wide open area. That was why there were experts who took all that into account and used it to their advantage.
"…"
As Isabelle waited there, she heard someone stepping on the gravel.
And as soon she looked that way…
"…I found you."
"?"
"I finally found you!! Sayuri!!"
A girl with semi-long brown hair and an exposed midriff had suddenly appeared. It was Murasame Kuina. Isabelle's eyes widened in confusion as the girl tightly wrapped her arms around her.
Still held in the girl's arms, Isabelle pulled her head back a little.
"Nuuun(deadpan). You do not seem to be hiding the components to a super-sized sniper rifle, so I will attempt to engage you in conversation."
"Hm? What is it, Sayuri?"
"However…"
The red military uniform girl's eyes clearly focused on the girl in front of her.
"My name is super-sized not Sayuri. It is Isabelle."

“What are you talking about? Your name is not Isabelle!”
Isabelle stepped back several meters for no real reason.
She had not particularly changed her location and she was not hiding, but Murasame Kuina seemed satisfied and spoke to her more quietly this time.
“Listen. Your name is Kawamo Sayuri. You were a normal middle school girl living in Harukawa City…no, in Toy Dream 40. You haven’t had any military training and you aren’t part of some weird group called Government. You really are just a middle school girl. You would go home without participating in any clubs, you were awful at anything athletic, and you always stuck by my side!”
“?”
“Oh, honestly!! Just look at this picture! This is you!”
The girl grabbed the thin chain around her neck and pulled an accessory out from the chest of her clothing. It was about the size of a large coin and it seemed to be a locket. She snapped it open to reveal the face of a slender Asian girl with long black hair.
Isabelle viewed the photo from a distance instead of moving closer for a better look. She seemed to be keeping distance between them and keeping an eye out for a surprise attack while her focus was on the photo.
“My face is not this expressionless. Zuuun (deadpan). This is super-sized wrong.”
“*The way you’re acting now is what’s wrong!* That Anthill Project messed with your very soul!!”
Murasame Kuina grabbed the shoulders of the red military uniform and roughly shook Isabelle while shouting at her.
But it did not get through.
It was like an infinite panel of soundproof glass separated them.
“How much do you know about the spiritual damage research that Government has been doing?”
“Not even a small-sized amount.”
“Oh, honestly. At least that part of you hasn’t changed,” groaned the girl.
“Listen. That’s a catchall term for all the impurities, bugs, errors, or whatever you want to call them that stick to people’s souls. They cause illness, insanity, and other bad things, so the usual desire is to find a way to get rid of them.”
“Now that you mention it, that is exactly what I thought it was. Point (deadpan).
“You weren’t thinking anything of the sort, were you? Anyway, they’ve shifted beyond that. Simply put, they want to *improve people’s specs* by attaching artificially-created spiritual damage to their souls.”
Kuina looked disgusted just saying it.
But she continued despite the bitter look on her face.
“It’s the digital version of what has long been known as an evil spirit or *namanari*. They start eating raw meat for nutrition, they grow horns from their head, they grow hair all over their body, and they grow claws and

fangs… You can just think of it as redesigning a human. If they wanted to, they could probably give you wings to fly through the sky or gills to breathe underwater. And if Government can do that, *surely you can tell that you mustn't rely on your current appearance.*"
"…"
In her red hat, Isabelle – or the girl going by that name – looked down at her hands.
The Anthills.
That project added the traits of a vessel to artificially create vessels.
"Hey, you're a vessel, so you know the penalty when you lose, right?"
"O-of course. I have a super-sized understanding of that. Ah ha ah ha ha (deadpan)."
"You do actually know that, don't you!? A-ahem. The loser's heart is hit by the same shock as seeing the god they worship killed before their eyes. They're stuck in a mindless daze for twenty four hours and they'll slowly obey what anyone says like a zombie. But it normally doesn't leave any lasting effects. Yes, normally."
"Am I not normal?"
"No. Government must have given you certain orders afterwards: 'Stand and fight. Summon something in sound range *** with a cost of *** and then lose.' The loser can't fight a complex battle, but there may have been something assisting you. And what do you think would happen to a human soul after doing that every few minutes…no, every half minute or so?"
"Nuuun (deadpan)…???"
"Then I'll tell you. There are different patterns to a damaged heart. By having you summon the Materials on a list put together for a certain purpose and then losing each time, they can reshape your soul how they want. It's a lot like chiseling away at a stone pillar. …And that's what Isabelle is. The pillar named Kawamo Sayuri was chiseled away again and again and again!! They chiseled away at you until you were an unrecognizable vessel!!"
Government was an ally of justice and they likely believed they were doing the right thing.
Even if they were creating a new table by taking apart, sawing at, and hammering at a beautiful paulownia dresser without knowing its value.
Thus, this was different from multiple personalities. It was more like a diamond created from a corpse.
The original person was no more. There was not a neat and tidy distinction between one and the other. Just as the picture in the locket and the blonde-haired blue-eyed military uniform girl looked nothing alike.
There was only Isabelle now.
"Hmm. Your claim does not even make a small-sized amount of sense."
"Why not?"
"Summoners and vessels work together as a set, so a summoner's soul would have had to be destroyed along with mine."

“Oh, that.”
“The Anthills are supposed to mass-produce vessels, so destroying a summoner for each vessel is super-sized inefficient…”
“It’s simple. Government sacrificed someone. That’s all.”
“?”
“One-on-one, they would destroy a summoner along with the vessel. But they just had to pair the mindless and broken summoner with another vessel candidate. And then they just had to give their orders. That summoner just had to bind contract after contract after contract after contract after contract after contract… The summoner doesn’t actually die. They don’t die, but they have to continue the process forever. Their life becomes nothing more than losing mock battles alongside each new vessel candidate. That’s a tragedy in its own right. That is the truth of the Anthills.”
Everyone had called them Anthills.
They may have assumed that was in reference to the building or facility.
But it was not.
The ants were eating through a person, not a thing.
Just like letting maggots crawl through stinky cheese, they intentionally opened holes in a human soul that was on the verge of crumbling into nothingness. While smiling at the improved flavor and value, they viewed the collapse as a good thing. It was a noble’s game.
“Unfortunately…”
Murasame Kuina bit her lip and kept her voice low.
“It doesn’t look likely that it’s possible to make you Kawamo Sayuri again. The research on the soul itself hasn’t gotten far and the greatest experts are in Government. But Government is full of scum and a single mistake could kill you instantly or transform you into some bizarre form. There’s nothing we can do.”
“…”
“But.”
At this point, the girl’s tone dropped even lower. Rather than coming from a vibration in her throat, it sounded like pure resentment seeping out from some other invisible organ.
“The people who did this and made you like this? I will send every last one of them to hell. Showing them hell isn’t enough. I need to send them all there. That’s all I can do, but because it’s all I can do, I will do it as best I can. You’ll see.”
Perhaps it was coming directly from her soul.
It was like a dark red mist that would be fatal to merely touch or inhale.
“So withdraw from all of this, Sayuri. You don’t need to protect them. You have no reason to. More importantly, the summoner I’ve bound a contract with is perfect. Biondetta will smash it all to pieces and I don’t want you caught in that.”

“I…” said the military uniform girl as her shoulders trembled. “I’m not very smart, so I don’t understand all these details even a small-sized amount.”
“Sayuri!!”
“Call me Isabelle. Sayuri doesn’t sound right to me.” She looked up. “But if I was created as something super-sized new after chiseling away a large pillar…”

She looked to the eyes of the girl she had once walked beside.
“And if, regardless of how it was made, it is a human soul that keeps me moving…”
And she said it.
Was this Kawamo Sayuri or Isabelle? Had this been there from the beginning or had it been added on later?
She did not know, but she spoke the honest thoughts in her mind.
“Then I don’t know if I should let my hatred destroy ‘this’.”
“…!!”
Isabelle heard the sound of teeth grinding together.
It came from Murasame Kuina. Her left hand trembled ominously in its leather glove. That was Girl’s Backdoor. When shaped like a gun, the strange device could control the young girl it pointed at. But Murasame Kuina did not aim it at Isabelle. She knew that was the simplest answer, but she could not let herself do it.
After all, Murasame Kuina knew that perfect answer had not come from the creation known as Isabelle. Her deep understanding of the girl named Kawamo Sayuri told her that.
But.
That was the real problem.
“Why did they have to take so much from you…?”
It lit the fire.
Massive firepower danced inside the internal combustion engine known as revenge.
“Why did the girl who thought like that have to be chewed up and spat back out as something entirely different all for someone else’s benefit!? Why did someone who thinks like that have to have her heart destroyed!?”
“…”
“You weren’t chosen because you had one-in-a-billion talent. It wasn’t because you drew a legendary sword, because you were delivered by an angel from heaven, or because of any other grand trigger! Biondetta told me even I probably had better talent as a vessel. But Government chose you because they wanted to know *if they could make something usable out of a completely normal person*!! That was all!! Government gathered people like they were searching for files and throwing them in the trash! They gathered them and used them up!! And yet…!!”
“But that is not even a small-sized reason to overlook what you are doing now.”
“Kh.”
“No one wanted you to do this.”
“Khhh.”
“I don’t want you to do this. I super-sized don’t want it.”
“Then!! What am I supposed to dooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooooo!?”

Murasame Kuina let out a roar as if filling the world itself with her resentment.
She already knew that.
She had understood it from the very, very beginning.
Even if she had been worried, a kindhearted girl like Kawamo Sayuri would not want anyone to take vengeance on her murderer. If the alternative was someone dirtying their hands like that or letting it influence them forevermore, she would have preferred to be forgotten.
But Murasame Kuina could not accept that.
It was her, not anyone else in the world, who could not allow it.
Revenge was nothing more than a way of soothing one's own heart. By losing oneself in the act of revenge, they could avoid looking at the unbearable loss that felt like an insurmountable wall towering before them.
She knew that.
She knew that, she knew that, she knew that!!
So was she supposed to coldly process the information and continue forward? Was the proper human response to trample on her anger and loss with the precision of a clock's second hand and dispassionately continue on into the future?
She did not think so.
She did not care if that conclusion meant her gears were broken.
When it came down to it, the girl named Murasame Kuina *did not want to forget.*
The everyday life she had assumed would continue like normal had been cruelly destroyed beyond repair. Her childhood friend of ten years had been altered and destroyed until she did not even recognize her own name.
She did not want to accept that.
She did not want to move beyond that.
So…
Her vengeance was directed at more than just a simple criminal. Society, the world, and the current age acted as tyrants who could only make justifications for using overwhelming quantity and speed to wash away, fade, and erode what she cared about most. She did not want that and could not accept that, so to protect "what had once been", she acted alone to face it all.
A fierce wind blew back at her.
A great pressure pushed back at her like a flash flood or a landslide.
But the girl had challenged it all head-on and made it this far.
And so much of her had been worn away in the process.
"I refuse to accept it."
Her voice sounded like the heavy creaking of a giant rusty gear being forced into motion.
"This might all be for naught and I might be meaninglessly running away from reality, but I don't care. Those people tore Kawamo Sayuri to shreds

and feasted on the profit, so I absolutely refuse to just let them go! Even if the entire world and you yourself don't want it!! I still won't accept it!!!!"
That was likely a form of justice.
And that made it much harder to stop than a simple evil deed.
Revenge was a justice that did not forgive, did not save, and did not bring happiness.
"…elp…"
Isabelle finally spoke as if she had been overwhelmed.
The unclear sound grew to a quiet voice.
"Help."
But she was not asking to be saved from this revenge.
Nor was she speaking on behalf of the researchers who had created her.
The face in the picture did not look right.
The name she heard did not sound right.
But this was still someone who was willing to express anger on her behalf.
So…
"Please help my friend."

Part 6

Shiroyama Kyousuke had first met Isabelle before binding a contract with her to take down the old-fashioned Illegal fighters over the Pacific.
It had been aboard the large Repliglass transport ship known as a Whooper Swan.
He had first asked if her name really was Isabelle.
She had not understood the point of the question, so she had answered that any name was fine: Sayuri, Isabelle, Before, or After. Even Doll or Weapon was acceptable. What she was called had no real meaning.
The boy had looked up into the sky.
When she had asked why, he had simply held a file out toward her.
It had given the name of their expected enemy.
A vessel was after revenge and working with an unknown summoner.
The vessel's name was Murasame Kuina.
The file had nothing to do with the midair battle over the Pacific. Shiroyama Kyousuke had already found bits and pieces of information on the enemy they were expected to run into that after that skirmish was over.
And he had known the reason behind the girl's revenge.
He had not known what Government was doing, but he had known that Isabelle was the result and that some kind of sacrifice had been made.

None of it had held much meaning for Isabelle.
She could not remember her original face or name.
Nothing in the file had seemed real to her.
But.
Even so.
The created girl named Isabelle had felt a slight ache in her heart when she saw the attached photo. She had not wanted that person to dirty their hands or destroy their body for her. She had not known where that feeling came from, but she had obeyed who she was at the moment. She had accepted it as correct.
So…
“Help her.”
The words had naturally left her lips.
She had pointed to her own chest with her thumb and relied on the slight feeling that remained inside her.
“Help this girl’s friend.”
But…
“No, I don’t think so.”
The summoner had shaken his head.
And he had said something else instead.
“But I’ll lend you a hand as soon as you’re willing to call her your friend.”

Part 7

A metallic sound burst out.
It came from Shiroyama Kyousuke and Biondetta.
They had both pulled out an Incense Grenade and slammed the bottom of it against the café billiards table.
It was like slamming down an empty glass after downing a strong drink.
The savior and the avenger glared at each other across the rectangular table.
“I will save Isabelle and her friend.”
“Oh? You aren’t giving in even after I brought up the Queen? How rare.”
“I don’t care if I’m contradicting myself. I can think that through later. None of that has anything to do with Isabelle who is asking for help right this instant.”
“Hee hee. You are obsessed with battle, aren’t you? The two of us are so very similar.”
She could say whatever she wanted.

She could mock and deride him however she wished.
With his eyes displaying renewed faith in himself, Kyousuke reached for the pin of the Incense Grenade he pressed against the table.
Horned Biondetta responded in kind.
“Even so…”
The savior rabbit made a definite declaration.
“Yes…”
The vengeance cat spoke in the exact same tone of voice.
“I will never stop helping people.”
“I will never stop helping people.”
They pulled the pins.
They kicked their chairs back as they stood up and simultaneously pulled out their Blood-Signs. After precisely five seconds, both Incense Grenades detonated. A twenty meter Artificial Sacred Ground was constructed and the two vessel girls were forcibly called over from the distant building rooftop.
“Let’s do this, Biondetta!!”
“I have decided on a super-sized reward for myself! So I will fight that girl!!”
The battle had begun before the girls even landed.
It was an extreme close-range fight. The opening ritual was the breaking of the three-dimensional Rose made of White Thorns, but they interfered with even that.
“Bang☆”
Biondetta acted first. With an explosive sound, she fired a sniper rifle round at close range.
She had yet to unfold her Blood-Sign, so she pulled the trigger in that state.
Kyousuke forcibly kept it away with his Repliglass Blood-Sign and rotated the Blood-Sign to let the force escape. He swung the long rod around for a powerful blow, but Biondetta used her folded gun barrel to hold it back and forcibly grabbed the heated joint of hers. She ignored the disconcerting sizzling sound as she unfolded the Blood-Sign. A second and third exchange followed.
They slipped through the slightest opening to launch White Thorns.
One from each of them struck the Rose simultaneously and the 216 Petals scattered across the Artificial Sacred Ground.
As the Petals were hit into the Spots, the two vessels changed form.
Murasame Kuina became the Original Green (k). Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 1.
Isabelle became the Original Yellow (s). Sound Range: High. Cost: 1.
They were both three meter slime Materials, but then something strange happened.
Kyousuke and Biondetta climbed directly onto the billiards table and directly clashed before the Materials could.

The attempt was obstructed by their protective circles, but those monsters of the 900s did not care.
“Cheshire Cat!!”
“Shut up, you damn rabbit!!”
They glared at each other.
It was almost like infighting in boxing, except they fought with their 180cm Blood-Signs.
Not even the Blood-Signs could break through the enemy’s protective circle, but anything else was fair game. When one Blood-Sign left its protective circle, the other would strike it. They deflected, diverted, and pushed. They worked to throw off their opponent’s aim, obstruct the growth of their Material, and gain the advantage themselves.
They seemed to be using spear or staff techniques, but it went beyond that.
The essence of a battle between summoners was building up their Materials and having them clash violently.
They would find slight gaps in the direct battle or work the interference into their plans and thus use the diverted path of their Blood-Sign to launch their White Thorns accurately around the Artificial Sacred Ground. A cushion of three or four ricochets was standard. Sometimes, they needed a complex set of six or seven ricochets to accurately hit the necessary Petal into a Spot.
This was a battle between those at the 900 level.
This was the realm of the monster children born from the results of the Fifteen Siblings Project.
It was a clash between savior and avenger.
Learning the rules of the occult and treating the Summoning Ceremony like a game…*was just plain silly*. This was the ultimate form of the ceremony in which they used everything the world had to offer in order to bring down the enemy before their eyes.

Kyousuke had the Feasting Flower (l v z – j). Sound Range: High. Cost: 4.
Biondetta had the Dancing Hammer (k k – h d i). Sound Range: High. Cost: 5.

Kyousuke had the Blood-Seeking Spear (b i h – e i – d p – t q). Sound Range: Low. Cost: 9.
Biondetta had the Scorpion’s Tail in the Sandstorm (h u – c e – k k – d i – a – x). Sound Range: Low. Cost: 10.

Kyousuke had the Glittering Steel Mantis Reaper 05 (v i – o u – q u c – s n – a – r o l – e i – y w – f v – l i). Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 21.

Biondetta had the Bubbling Gears that Bring Aging and Reap Lifespans (n j – o u – h a – j v – a – l m – e i –t z – k r – n o – x i – g). Sound Range: Middle. Cost: 22.

One was a five meter mantis seemingly made of silver armor. That ultimate predator sliced through everything with its scythes that glittered like laser blades, bit into it all, brought it to its mouth, and chewed it apart.
The other was a collection of countless gears of varying size, making it one of the most inorganic Materials. That bizarre sadist sent the grinding sound of its interlocking gears slipping into the target's ears, which caused them to rapidly age like some kind of curse.
Kyousuke had made the first move, but Biondetta had followed after and always matched his sound range. Plus, her cost was always one above his. As he was acting first, Kyousuke's Material was naturally more worn down and cost was everything in the same sound range, so it was like being forced into a race where your rival's car was always blocking the way ahead.
But that just meant he had to put a stop to that.
During their high-speed exchange of White Thorns, Kyousuke used every method he had to interfere with her: grabbing at her Blood-Sign with his, throwing a smoke or stun grenade disguised as an Incense Grenade, using his Blood-Sign to grab at the coffee or tea cups on the tables and throw them at her, etc.
But none of it got through.
She kicked away the smoke grenade, she placed a metal tray over the stun grenade and stomped on it, she dodged the drink containers so they would not even hit her protective circle.
And in response, Biondetta spread her legs to shoulder width.
Kyousuke naturally grew cautious of what was hidden up that short skirt.
(Is it an interference style of grenade!?)
"Your gaze."
Hearing that, he realized the action had been a feint.
"Tch!!"
He quickly looked up just in time to hear Biondetta clack her back teeth unnaturally. The sharp light of a magnesium reaction escaped the demon's mouth and stabbed into his eyes.
"Isn't being two steps ahead the standard for us?"
In that slight pause and safe period she had created, Biondetta's Blood-Sign rapidly launched a White Thorn. It was not a strength-focused power shot. She just barely grazed the far right edge of the glowing white sphere for an intense spin shot. The White Thorn drew a sharp curve like a boomerang and accurately struck a certain Petal.
"My formation is already complete."
It was a small pile of three or four Petals.
And when they scattered, they reached other piles.
And on and on and on.
"My mirror-image copying strategy is only a smokescreen to hide my true intent."

More and more Petals were hit like falling dominoes, the chain reaction grew, and they were all flooded into the Spots. With each one, Biondetta's Material grew with frightening speed. Instead of a great number at once, it was a great number in a row. She built up the cost in no time as if running up a flight of stairs.
"And that true intent is to lay landmines which trigger a chain reaction!! Once the avalanche has begun, you have no way to stop it!!"
It was like a clean sweep.
The next thing he knew, she had exceeded a level that could be described with cost difference and sound range.
As Biondetta shook her tail decoration, a tall dark figure spoken of in Egyptian mythology stood next to her. That evil god was the symbol of injustice who ruled over dryness and darkness. He had killed Osiris, ruler of the underworld, and temporarily taken his throne.
In other words, this was from the Divine-class.
Kyousuke was still stuck in the Regulation-class, so there was simply no way for him to defeat this.
"Farewell, savior. Farewell, my despicable mirror-image."
Biondetta lightly spun her Blood-Sign around like a baton as she smiled thinly. She rested the long rod on her shoulder and spoke.
"When you next wake, this will all be over. So rest easy and enjoy the taste of defeat."
The waitress demon snapped her other hand's fingers.
A moment later, the darkness rushed in.
The dark figure's silhouette crumbled into a deadly mist that dried up everything it touched. And that flew toward Kyousuke's Material…toward Isabelle.
No Regulation-class Material of any sound range could defeat a Divine-class.
Thus, she should have been destroyed in a single blow.
And she would have been if not for the high-pitched sound as Kyousuke himself cut in between them inside his protective circle.
That circle would remain as long as his Material was not destroyed and he would not experience the mindlessness of defeat.
The protective circle defended against all external and internal factors that would obstruct the summoner….or rather, the ceremony itself.
Biondetta spun around the Blood-Sign that had been resting on her shoulder.
"Stalling for time earns you nothing."
"True, this doesn't solve the fundamental problem. And this cheap trick won't work again. My kinetic vision can't keep up with a Divine-class's movements. And more importantly, all Materials are filled with combative instincts, so it'll probably charge at me itself."
Yes.

If this strategy was effective, the theory of these battles would be very different. The summoners would stand out front to receive all the attacks while the Material bombarded their enemy from safety.
But that was not how things worked.
The Material moved out front and the summoner stayed back. There was a good reason for that.
And yet…
“But it took you an awful long time to set everything up, didn’t it? The Artificial Sacred Ground lasts for an average of ten minutes. So how much time has passed? Eight minutes? Nine? The White Petals are recharged every ten seconds, so it shouldn’t be that hard to keep track of the time.”
“You don’t mean…?”
“I just have to escape.”
He thrust his Blood-Sign forward this time.
“Besides, this isn’t our real fight. So thanks for showing off that special strategy that I’m sure you’ve put a lot of effort into developing. I think I’ll put that data to good use when it comes to our evacuation operation.”
*“You…you damn rabbiii

“So you need to be careful. There’s nothing left to protect *you*.”
“Wha-…!? Oh, no!?”
She did not have time to shout.
One of the countless pillars had something like a metal tower or framework sticking out horizontally. As soon as she spotted that maintenance crane shaft with its attached pulley, a dreadfully dull sound burst out.
Kyousuke did not bother checking what happened to Biondetta after she vanished from view. He extended his arms and legs to control his midair position and approached Isabelle who was also falling.
He held her in his arms and aimed for the ocean surface.
They produced a mighty splash.

Part 8

An object quietly swayed back and forth in midair.
“Honestly…”
It was the waitress demon named Biondetta.
Just before colliding with the crane shaft, she had used the wind pressure and her position to twist around like an acrobat jumper and wrapped her entire body in the long leather belt that normally held her Blood-Sign. And instead of randomly, it was calculated out to distribute the impact to her body like a parachute harness.
Then she had intentionally wrapped it around the metal framework of the crane shaft to fully escape the impact that should have torn off a limb if not breaking her torso in two.
Her cellphone rang.
She answered it while still dangling down and heard the voice of her client and vessel Murasame Kuina.
“Where are you!?”
“If you look up, you should see my finest pair of adult underwear.”
“Well, as long as you can still move. I landed in the water safely, so let’s decide where to meet up.”
“Yes, of course. But please be on the lookout for *that damn rabbit*. He loves tricks as much as me, so I could see him finding you on your own and defeating you to avoid the battle between summoners.”
“Then you come get me.”
“Yes, ma’am.”

She manipulated the leather belt so it seemed to move on its own like a strange tentacle and she managed to climb on top of the complicated framework of the crane shaft.
The closest emergency staircase was three meters away, but she did not hesitate to take the jump without a running start. She did not reach the landing on her level, but her feet accurately found the landing a level lower.
“It hurts that he managed to get away with knowledge of our technique. Biondetta, do you have a way to make up for that lost advantage?”
“I will prepare anything you desire, ma’am.”
Biondetta jumped more than ran down the emergency stairs located alongside the pillar.
“I already explained that there is a good possibility that their evacuation operation and bodyguard plan have been changed, didn’t I?”
“What about it?”
“Given the balance of power within Government, *that damn rabbit* won’t be able to change their bodyguard plans so easily. To put it another way, they’ll ignore him at some point. And that will create friction. I just need to read his algorithm. I just need to ask what I would do.”
“Get to the point.”
“I can settle this with a single phone call.”
She arrived at the lowest level which was just off the ocean’s surface.
She removed the cellphone from her ear and spoke directly to the soaking wet girl in front of her.
“What demon doesn’t whisper into the ear of an impure soul to bend them to her will?”

Part 9

Kyousuke and Isabelle had arrived on the opposite bank.
The leather glove on his left hand felt uncomfortable after soaking up the seawater, but he could not complain.
They climbed onto the concrete base and used the emergency stairs to arrive at a giant bridge covered in pedestrians. He casually glanced around, but the costume event worked against him here. That striking waitress uniform would be buried among all the outfits of the Delayed Walpurgis.
The Government coordinator spoke to him over his smartphone.
“Alice (with) Rabbit, Government has made some adjustments based on your request. For the withdrawal operation, we can spare a Stingray Repliglass transport ship and a Blue Whale Repliglass submarine. They will

be carrying the classified server that acts as the core unit of the entire Anthill Project and Miss Maria Heartocean who leads the project. Is that acceptable?"
"Perfectly."
"I have emailed you the details of the plan, but simply put, the Stingray will pick up Miss Heartocean within Toy Dream 35, carry her to the Blue Whale outside the city, and that will dive to bring her out of the country. You can only help in the Stingray zone which is the only part that Liar Cat can attack."
"That's fine. The *Cheshire Cat* is bound to show up no matter how obvious a trap it is. She isn't going to wait for her revenge to grow cold."
"…Are you saying you've already made contact with her?"
Kyousuke hung up without answering.
Isabelle shook her head like a wet dog and looked up at him with water dripping from her.
"I said it in the beginning."
"Yeah."
"As long as you fulfill my objective in the very, very end, I'll go along with a super-sized number of detours."
"I remember. So let's go save your friend who's been deceived by that liar of a cat. …It's true she may have been the initial spark, but it never would have grown this much without that *Cheshire Cat* continually dumping fuel onto it."
What was salvation to the girl named Isabelle and what could he do to help her?
Not even he knew that anymore.
She was a cheaply and simply made vessel. For that purpose alone, her soul had been eaten away, her physical appearance had crumbled due to that, and not even her own parents or best friend could have recognized the pitiful ruins she had become. She was what had budded from that.
But the girl had hoped for something.
Her sense of self, mind, personality, memories, and everything else were only vaguely defined, but she had still wanted to save the friend whose name and face she could not remember but who she had apparently once walked alongside.
That was her most pressing desire and she felt granting it would save her as well.
So Alice (with) Rabbit would respect the definition Isabelle had found for herself.
He would respect the heart that, before even thinking of saving herself, had wished to return that misguided friend to the proper path.
"I'll ask you as many times as it takes. Bow (deadpan)."
"Right."
"Please help my friend."

It was only slightly different from the cold and distant request she had made before.
But the words had definitely come from the small girl's heart.
It was not someone's empty shell.
It was not the mere vestiges of someone.
It truly came from the heart of the girl named Isabelle.
Kyousuke still had no definite definition of what would save this girl.
But he smiled just a little.
In the end, he was taking the same path as Biondetta. It was a twisted path that could never be seen as straight. At first glance, it looked like he was granting a request, but he was really drawing out the words he most wanted to hear. He knew that, but he was still satisfied.
Even if that path was about to crumble away, he still believed it could bear the weight of at least one life.
"As you wish."
The summoner and the vessel disappeared into the crowd.
The sun would set soon.
Then the all-important Anthill evacuation operation would slice through the darkness.

Or a Story Set Further in the Past

They had been together since they were little.
They had always, always been together.
Even among childhood friends and groups of friends, a leader or a hierarchy tended to form. But that sort of distortion never seemed to form between Murasame Kuina and Kawamo Sayuri.
They could decide who made the day's decisions with a coin toss.
Sometimes Murasame Kuina would tug on her friend's hand and head out to play, but other times Kawamo Sayuri would selfishly insist they were going out to eat ice cream and crepes. If someone had asked them who the leader was, they both would have immediately pointed at their own face and said "me". But that was fine. That was why they were truly equal friends, unlike the other groups whose equality was only skin deep.
"Kuina-chan, over here."
"Eh heh heh. We're in the same class again."
"What should we do over the next break? Is there anywhere you want to go?"
Of course, it was a human relationship, so there had been complications.

But in the end, they had shared everything.
They had always found themselves smiling together once it was all over.
They had been the best of friends.
No matter what happened, they had assumed there was no way they could ever be separated.
“Let’s make a promise.”
“If either of us runs into some kind of trouble, we’ll go help each other out.”
“It’s a promise. Okay, Sayuri?”

“…”
Murasame Kuina remembered something that filled her with despair.
She stood by a grave as the sun set. She had made it herself. There had been no remains and no one knew whether Kawamo Sayuri was alive or dead, so the grave was empty.
“I told myself I wouldn’t cry in front of her,” she muttered as the waitress demon stood next to her. “But she must have told herself the same thing. She was a crybaby and a worrier. It was the worst possible combination, but she was always smiling in front of me.”
She remembered. Only Murasame Kuina remembered.
The girl had seemed plain and quiet, but she had actually been a jack-of-all-trades who could do anything. But she had never noticed her own value and instead focused on collecting mascots like Juddark and Sheriff Kitty even after entering middle school. Instead of climbing to the next stage, she had believed happiness lay in what she already had. She had been Cinderella before finding the fairy godmother.
It was a meaningless conversation.
The endlessly dry air blew between the two of them.
And finally, Biondetta quietly spoke.
“Ma’am.”
“What?”
“There is no need to restrain yourself any longer.”
That had been her limit.
Murasame Kuina’s face crumpled and something clogged inside her flowed out. Her tear ducts opened and large clear drops filled her eyes.
Before they could fall down her cheeks, the waitress demon embraced the girl.
All she could do was cry.
“Why!? Why!?”
All the words she had been holding back spilled out and she shouted at the world’s unfairness.
“Why did it have to be Sayuri? Why did she have to be chosen, why did she have to have everything taken from her, and why did she have to be made into a toy for whoever those Government people are!? Why did she have to have her soul messed with and her body and personality destroyed! That…

that isn't Sayuri anymore! She looks like a French doll made from her body!! Why did something so terrible have to happen to her!?"
Biondetta said nothing.
She simply waited as her client let out everything she had kept bottled up in her chest.
"And worst of all, why don't we have the power to turn her back into Sayuri!? I don't care about any of this summoner or vessel stuff. I couldn't care less about the gods or the Unexplored-class beyond them!! If you have so much power stored up, then why can't you save just one girl!?"
It was a lament of despair.
It was a cry of resentment toward herself and others and a call for the destruction of the world.
But Biondetta did not laugh. Nor did she show any disgust or mockery.
Who had decided that the will of the world mattered more than individual circumstances? Who had decided that a small heart had to be crushed when it saw that giant metal ball at the top of a slope?
It had nothing to do with logic, efficiency, calculations, or profit.
What was wrong with fighting simply to fulfill one's own heart?
"Ma'am."
Biondetta quietly spoke to Murasame Kuina who continued to bawl in her arms like a child.
"It is true I lack the power to save Miss Kawamo Sayuri. My power may not be what you truly desire."
She spoke earnestly and sincerely.
She gathered strength in the arms around the girl.
"But if you wish, I will assist you with any form of revenge. There is no need to worry about the realistic difficulty of it. I am Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat. I am nothing more than a tool to accomplish your revenge."
"…"
The girl simply sobbed for a while.
But as time slowly passed, Murasame Kuina wrapped her arms around the waitress demon's back. She grabbed at the fabric and clenched it so very, very tightly that it nearly tore.
"Lend me your strength, Biondetta…"
That resentful voice seemed to echo up from the depths of hell.
At the same time, it was the voice of a girl who felt hopelessly trapped.
"I can never forgive Government!! They turned Sayuri into that!! They tore our memories to pieces! And yet they have the nerve to call themselves the world police!! So I don't care if it's wrong or if it means straying from the proper path! Lend me your strength, Biondetta!! I need that for my…no, for our revenge! So *help me*!! *Help us*!!!!!"
Still embracing the girl who was as dangerous as shattered glass, Biondetta silently smiled.
And the demon spoke the decisive words.
"As you wish."

Facts

- Shiroyama Kyousuke and Biondetta Shiroyama are both Summoning Ceremony experts raised in the Fifteen Siblings Project. Each participant came into contact with the White Queen and later either died or became a summoner at the 900 level, but the individual details, survival, and affiliation are unknown.
- Similarly, Kyousuke seems to have taken in the White Queen's love and Biondetta the White Queen's hatred. Biondetta's speech patterns and general behavior show some similarities with the Queen, but details are unknown.
- The Anthills are much like imitations built up from the wreckage of the Fifteen Siblings Project. However, it became something entirely different due to a failed understanding of that project's true meaning.
- Isabelle's real name is Kawamo Sayuri and she is Japanese. The Anthill Project had someone experience repeated planned losses in the Summoning Ceremony over a short period of time to intentionally carve away at their soul and create the spiritual traits needed as a vessel.
- Maria Heartocean destroyed Kawamo Sayuri's soul and constructed Isabelle.
- If multiple summoners use Incense Grenades simultaneously and their Artificial Sacred Grounds come into contact, the Artificial Sacred Grounds will fuse. Ownership of the Artificial Sacred Ground remains with the summoner who set up theirs first.
- The protective circle can be used to stop Material attacks (although there are exceptions such as the White Queen). But based on the Material's mobility, the summoner can only react once or twice at the most, so it is not a good long-term strategy.
- The girl said she wanted Shiroyama Kyousuke to help the avenger named Murasame Kuina…no, to help "her" friend.

Stage 04: Revenge and the Plan for Perfect Vessels

「お客様」

「今最高に面白いところですので、少々黙りやがれですわ☆」

(Stage 04 Open 05/23 19:00)

ステージ04

復讐劇と完全なる依代達の計画

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Ma’am.”
“This is the very best part, so kindly shut the hell up☆”
(Stage 04 Open 05/23 19:00)
Revenge and the Plan for Perfect Vessels

Part 1

Let us review the specs.
The Stingray was a large Repliglass sea transport vessel 35 meters long and 43 meters wide. Its overall silhouette was similar to a stingray or like a boomerang-shaped stealth bomber with a long tail attached. Despite its size, it could travel across the ocean surface at 200 kph. The world’s largest air cushion ship was a 50 meter amphibious assault ship, but this could hold an even larger load.
The Blue Whale was even bigger. It was a Repliglass submarine 70 meters long. It did not have the same speed, but it was a rare model that brought together great size and silent movement. There were many varieties: for combat, for transportation, for underwater data management, etc. Its overall silhouette goes without saying. As a side note, some environmental protection groups seemed to hate that a strategic missile weapons platform had been given that name.
“And with that out of the way…”
The coordinator woman who wore a military uniform spoke with her back to a whiteboard in the large conference room of A Block’s international airport.
“First, Miss Maria Heartocean and the Anthill classified server will be placed on the Stingray. It will be guided to the ocean surface directly below this airport which is supported in the air by several pillars, so that should not be difficult. Of course, our information says Liar Cat’s Blood-Sign can be used as a sniper rifle, so we cannot let our guard down. Miss Heartocean will be wearing a small Repliglass VIP protection suit known as a Water Bear and we will surround her with riot shields.”
A map and cross section of the airport were projected on the whiteboard and some arrows were added. In addition to the simple route to the Stingray, a few possible sniping points had apparently been located.
“We must keep in mind that the Stingray must get away from Toy Dream 35 with Miss Heartocean onboard. That might sound easy at 200 kph, but that is not how it works. With its size and all of Toy Dream 35’s pillars, do not assume it can move freely through the ocean. It will be taking a very

indirect route. If Liar Cat attacks with the Summoning Ceremony, it will likely be here. …Simply put, *they will jump onboard.*"
Now a map of Toy Dream 35 and the surrounding ocean appeared.
There were a few different options for the Stingray's route, but they all looked as indirect as the coordinator had said.
"The Blue Whale submarine will be waiting sixty kilometers out at sea. If the Stingray arrives here, Miss Heartocean and the server can be transferred over. This is the final challenge. While it isn't impossible, it is unlikely a summoner can attack the Blue Whale when it is deep under the ocean. You can effectively think of this as the goal."
The coordinator paused there, did not sit down, and looked to Shiroyama Kyousuke who was leaning against the far wall. Government's Repliglass soldiers and summoners also focused on him.
"Now, then. All of that is nothing more than a flimsy excuse to draw out Miss Heartocean. This will come down to a battle between 900 level summoners. Several Anthills and their bases have already been destroyed, so Liar Cat's skill far exceeds what our defenses were designed for. What we can muster now could easily just get in your way. This is of course dependent on the situation, but can we generally leave the fighting to you?"
"Yes."
The Government personnel did not protest Kyousuke's blunt reply.
Freedom was a gathering of around five hundred individual summoners. They were all mighty warriors with no hierarchy and barely any friendly relationships. Nevertheless, they could stand on the same level as the world police of Government and the criminal organizations of Illegal. In other words, it was widely understood that they were seemingly legendary people who could singlehandedly hold their own against entire groups and could push back an international coalition if all five hundred gathered together.
The only ones who ever snapped back at Kyousuke were high officials who knew nothing of the frontline or high officials who had never seen a Freedom member with a high level of Awards.
"And with that in mind, I would like to ask something. The battle will most likely occur on the Stingray's deck, so is there any problem with that?"
"Not at all. We won't be thrown off while the Artificial Sacred Ground is active and its size should be adequate for whatever kind of fight we end up having. It should be perfect for settling this once and for all."
"Are you confident in your skill?"
"If I was going to lose to that *Cheshire Cat*, I wouldn't be standing here right now."
"Good. Then let's get started!"
The coordinator woman clapped her hands twice. Like a switch had been thrown, the people gathered in the conference room left to prepare for battle and take their positions.
The military uniform girl named Isabelle followed Kyousuke out and asked a question as they strayed from the general flow of people.

“Nuuun (deadpan). I would super-sized like to know where we’re going.”
“I would like to take a detour before taking our position.”
The two of them walked between an elf and an alarm clock costume on their way to the maintenance hatch leading below the midair international airport. The door opened like a submarine hatch and a glance through it showed they were already on an elevated floor. More than one hundred pillars were lined up to support them several dozen meters up. The airport float itself was 250 meters up, but the many shopping buildings extended straight down like icicles. This was like the rooftop of a normal building.
Far below that, a giant stingray silhouette floated in the dark ocean. It was the Repliglass Stingray.
“What do you think?”
“?”
“If I was making the attack, I would stop the Stingray right away. Wouldn’t the simplest method be pouring a ton of rubble down on it from above? And this is…”
Kyousuke leaned down through the maintenance hatch as he spoke.
This was an upside down rooftop and the underside was not a flat surface. Just as the underside of a metal bridge was reinforced by a framework of steel beams, a steel framework was built up like a jungle gym. It must have doubled as a means of maintaining the wiring and plumbing because skinny walkways and stairs were set up like a theatre catwalk.
“You wouldn’t even need to use a Material. A single bomb and you can *send down as solid a shutter as you need*.”
“That isn’t good. If they’re going to bring down an entire building, we’re super-sized not up to the task. We’d never find the bomb.”
“They won’t go that far. And I’m not just being optimistic; it would be too inefficient. Demolishing an entire building would require dozens if not more than a hundred bombs precisely placed at key structural points and then they would all have to be detonated at once. Even with a group of specialists, it’s a precision job that takes more than a week. To be blunt, it would be unnecessary work and the odds of failure are pretty high. If all they have to do is stop the Stingray, stripping off and dropping the top of the roof would be enough.”
“Then will the Liar Cat pair be coming here?”
“First, we need to see if there’s a bomb already set up. If not, we can lie in wait at least until the Stingray below leaves.”
That was their first step.
And the lack of an attack was not a cause for celebration.
Biondetta and Murasame Kuina of Liar Cat would definitely show up. Kyousuke and Isabelle had to fight and defeat them somewhere, so they needed to take up the most useful position for that.
“Oh, Maria’s coming out,” said Isabelle in her red hat.
Several bodyguards with transparent shields surrounded a single figure in the Repliglass Water Bear that resembled a lumpy human caterpillar. They

used the “upside down rooftop” of another building to reach the emergency stairs along one of the giant pillars supporting the international airport.
Kyousuke slowly exhaled and looked around.
As far as he could see, the demon with the folded Blood-Sign that doubled as a sniper rifle was not present. And in that self-defense Repliglass suit, Maria Heartocean would not die from a 7.62mm rifle bullet.
“They’re bringing out something else. Fidget fidget (deadpan).”
“Is that the Anthill server?”
Several Repliglass soldiers left along a different pillar. They were units with grasshopper-like back legs. They carried a metal cube like movers. It was likely the classified server that weighed more than a ton.
That was the cornerstone of the project that had smashed Isabelle’s soul and ruined her life.
And it had done it so thoroughly that she could not even judge how sad that was.
What did it look like for her to see it carried to safety like this?
“…”
Kyousuke watched Maria and the server as they were carried to the Stingray using different emergency staircases.
He glanced around, searched for presences, and read his enemy’s algorithm.
And then he muttered to himself.
“Odd…”
“What is? They seem to be making quick progress. Whoosh (deadpan).”
“That’s what’s odd. If I was making the attack, I wouldn’t wait for my opponent to complete their preparations. Even if this wasn’t where I planned to settle things, I’d still use a bomb or rocket to hinder them right at the beginning. Even if they want to pursue their target to savor their revenge, it would stimulate their sadistic desires more if they broke one of their target’s legs first.”
“…Hm? If you were making the attack?”
“Well, I don’t often run across someone I hate that much. …I think the ‘color white’ would be the only exception.”
At any rate, Maria and the server had arrived at the Stingray floating in the ocean. This would be the easiest time for an attack, but there was no sign of Biondetta or Murasame Kuina.
Were they hesitating to attack because the bodyguards were on the highest alert? Nonsense. Liar Cat had broken right through the main entrance of fully-equipped Anthill bases.
Had they not figured out where Maria was hiding or how she would escape? Nonsense. They had acquired all the information on the Anthills using Lu Niang Lan and Aika. Biondetta would be able to read ahead on the algorithm to know what they would do at normal times, during emergencies, *and after Kyousuke’s interference.*
And yet they had not shown up.

Kyousuke spent a few seconds wondering what that meant.
“Don’t tell me…”
“?”
Isabelle looked puzzled and Kyousuke grabbed the back of her collar.
He immediately jumped from the catwalk-like walkway.
They were several dozen meters up. Falling on the Stingray’s deck (which was larger than a tennis court) would mean instant death. Falling into the ocean would knock them out and they could drown.
But instead of dropping straight down, Kyousuke made quick hops between different surfaces: from pillar to pillar, from emergency staircase railing to railing, from maintenance crane shaft to the heavy hook dangling from the end of the wire, etc. In less than twenty seconds, they descended the height of ten flights of stairs and landed on the Stingray’s deck.
He let go of Isabelle and approached Maria Heartocean just as she was being loaded inside the Stingray. No, he approached the Water Bear she wore.
He asked a question as he walked over.
“What is the meaning of this?”
“What are you-…?”
It was the surrounding Repliglass soldiers who attempted to reply.
After holding out a hand to silence them, Kyousuke grabbed the Water Bear’s hand and forcefully twisted it. Like an aikido throw, it spun around and its back slammed against the deck.
Before the bodyguards could panic, he let out a cold voice.
“Show me your face.”
“…”
“Did you think you’d be safe if you were inside that Water Bear? I know plenty of ways to take that thing apart.”
With the sound of a soda being opened, the neck and torso split in two and opened.
“Happy Walpurgis,” muttered Kyousuke.
It was not the Maria Heartocean *who he knew so well* that appeared.
Instead of a woman who looked like a school doctor, he saw a muscular soldier. The bodyguards must not have been informed because they were taken aback and froze in place.
“I’m guessing the server is a fake too.”
“These were my orders. I don’t know what he’s thinking, but I can’t disobey my commanding officer.”
The body double raised her hands and argued her case.
This was why Biondetta and Murasame Kuina of Liar Cat had not attacked.
“I even told him increasing the number of targets would shift the enemy’s aim and make them harder to predict…”
Kyousuke gestured to a nearby Repliglass soldier. That solider must have contacted the Stingray’s bridge because he finally replied.

“Another large reading was detected nearby. Until now, a secret code had interfered and caused it to disappear from our radar. It’s the same size as this one, so another Stingray was likely sent in. Miss Heartocean and the server may be there.”
“And Liar Cat didn’t show up here. They read this all perfectly, including this irregularity. …In fact, it may have been Biondetta that set this up.”
“Wait a second. Then…?”
“Don’t worry about it. This wasn’t your mistake. The problems are all in your commander’s head,” spat out Kyousuke. “Where is the other Stingray?”
“Not far. Between two and three thousand meters.”
“Then hurry. All hell will already have broken loose out there.”

Part 2

What had happened was simple.
Miyama Gouta had happened. He was the military officer from Government who was in charge of security at the Anthill Project using a portion of A Block’s international airport. He was also the man who had argued with Shiroyama Kyousuke during the planning stages of the evacuation operation and gotten his nose smashed against a door.
At first, he had been furious.
But not because a little boy had slighted him, not because a Freedom member knew about Government’s internal situation, and not because he had been shamed in front of Maria Heartocean.
He did not care about loyalty to the organization, the success of the mission, or fulfillment of his duty.
There was only one thing he wanted.
He only wanted *a seat on Noah’s Ark* along with the other Anthill VIPs.
“Goddammit!!”
Then someone had called his private cellphone.
Only his wife and son should have known that number, but the voice he heard belonged to a complete stranger.
“Nice to meet you. I am Biondetta Shiroyama, aka Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat. I have some very valuable information for you, my enemy. Could I have a moment of your time?”
“Wha-…!?”
His mind had gone blank.
But before he could say anything more, it was over.

Someone had grabbed his shoulders from behind. He was supposedly alone in his office, but he was turned around and his back was slammed against the top of a nearby table.
While he was lying on his back and unable to breath, a waitress demon shook her tail decoration and leaned her seductively lithe body over him as if to climb on top of him.
Hadn't Shiroyama Kyousuke said that someone else could do this if he could? And that those who killed were better at it than those who defended?
Feeling like a frog being stared down by a snake, Miyama dropped his phone. He could not move a single finger and Biondetta's voice seemed to sneak into his ear from close range.
"How about we discuss something that will benefit both of us?"
"What are you-…? I would never work with the likes of you!"
"Are you sure?" The demon smiled. "Let's say the two of us go all out trying to kill each other. I might be killed by Government as a whole…but you will undoubtedly die along the way. No matter where you run or hide and even if you are moved to a moon base or nuclear shelter, I will make sure of it. I believe I have *already proven my skill*."
"…"
"So this is not about choosing whether you live or die. At this rate, you will cough up blood and die either way. It does not matter whether or not the operation succeeds. Unless, that is, you cheat and bend the rules."
She placed her smooth fingertip on Miyama Gouta's left hand.
Specifically, on the simple ring he wore on the ring finger.
"Returning to your normal home like normal and seeing the normal smiles on your family's faces. Is there any greater happiness in the world?"
"What…are you…?" muttered the military officer in a scratchy voice.
He had not noticed the change to the scales in his mind. His survival here and the safety of his family were two different issues, but he began to conflate the two.
And that view reduced the guilt toward breaking his professional ethics.
A desire to board Noah's Ark was the only thing on his mind.
"What do you want me to do…?"
"Prepare a body double."
It was a simple suggestion.
"I will sink Government's bodyguard team and you can use that time to escape with the Anthill's classified information and VIPs. A good deal for both of us, don't you think?"
"How does that benefit you as an assassin?"
"We only need to show some results. Cutting through Government's defense system and humiliating the supposed world police is more than enough. All we want is something we can point to as a business card. Whether or not the VIP actually dies is not as important."
"…"

“As I said, this isn’t about whether I do it or not.” The demon giggled. “No matter what you choose, that Stingray is going down. The only question is whether you are onboard it or not. You can refuse if you like. You can even follow protocol and report this. But don’t forget that doing so is the same thing as throwing out your ticket onto the ark☆”

The military officer knew that the conflict between Government, Illegal, and Freedom was not the three-way stalemate it appeared to be.
Even when it looked like a hopeless head-on clash, things would be arranged in secret and the results would be predetermined like a fixed game.
Sometimes it was for territory and sometimes it was for a summoner’s Awards.
He had heard of those things, so this just meant he had seen it for himself this time.
Or so he thought.
Or perhaps he just wanted to think that.
And yet…

“Ah…ah…”
Miyama Gouta paled and groaned aboard the combat bridge of the real Stingray.
The lights had already turned to the red warning color and the monitors showed yellow and red damage across the craft.
Powerful shocks shook the craft and the lights occasionally flickered disconcertingly despite how many ways the power system was supposed to be backed up.
Liar Cat.
Who could accept that just two people could cause this much damage?
“Ahh…ahhhh….”
The military official cursed his own actions.
Why had he believed this was a secret deal between Government and Freedom?
Why had he conveniently accepted that an oral promise with no records would be upheld?
The enemy only did what benefited her.
No matter how nice the suggestion sounded, there had to be some advantage for the enemy hidden there.
“Ahh, ahh.”
He heard a voice that sounded far too calm for the hopeless situation.
It was Maria Heartocean, the researcher for the Anthill Project. The body of her Repliglass Water Bear split apart and she removed the head like it was a costume.

“What are we going to do about this? It’s a complete mess. Is this the end of the road for me?”
“…”
He seriously considered giving up on everything, firing a single bullet, and stealing the Water Bear to ensure his own safety.
But he stopped himself.
That would only be destroying himself. There was a more effective way of boarding Noah’s Ark.
“Miss Heartocean.”
“Yes?”
“This way! Hurry! Escaping the Stingray is the only way to protect you!!”
He grabbed the Water Bear’s hand and Maria sighed while covering herself with the Repliglass again.
They left the central combat bridge, ran down the hall, and heard gunfire and several footsteps.
A horribly heavy tremor and several screams and shouts followed.
“What are we going to do?”
“Kh… The Stingray is equipped with a small Repliglass VTOL craft. If we can board that…”
A dull sound shot past a corridor corner and slammed into the wall.
It was a badly destroyed combat Repliglass soldier.
And then the waitress demon poked her head out from around the corner.
She may have been injured when boarding the Stingray because she had blood all over her. A fierce smile appeared on her lips.
“Found you☆”
An Artificial Sacred Ground was in effect.
It was in the ninety second Chain state. If they were caught in that, they would die. Miyama Gouta knew that even though he generally did not directly fight with the Summoning Ceremony.
He turned 180 degrees and ran down the hallway on the pretext of protecting Maria.
“Sound Range: High. Cost: 1. The Original Yellow (s). Why do you think I’ve continued using the weakest Original series when I could build it up further?” Biondetta’s singsong voice loudly reached him from behind. “Be – cause! We couldn’t savor the taste of revenge if it ended too quickly. It would be boring to end it instantly with a bullet to the head or with a Divine- or Unexplored-class attack to the Stingray. I’m keeping our destructive power down at the perfect level to thoroughly enjoy this☆”
Weakest or not, a Material was a Material.
It was a monster from another world. Not even a squadron of tanks or fighters could damage it.
Several combat Repliglass soldiers ran past Miyama and Maria to face the monster.
“We’ll buy you some time!!”
“Hurry up and get Miss Heartocean to safet-…”

A great noise cut them off.
“Hee hee.”
The series of destructive noise just about drove all sense of reality from Miyama’s mind. He could not bring himself to look back. He could only imagine a giant mouth was approaching while chewing through everything in its path.
“What happened to those summoners we’ve been wasting so much money on!?”
“You mean the 700 level ones? They’ve already taken their money and jumped into the sea!! We have to do this ourselves!”
“Seriously? Goddammit! Are you serious!? …Gabgh!?”
“Hee hee hee hee hee hee.”
He desperately continued running with sweat covering his face.
He was willing to sacrifice his men, deceive his allies, and use his superiors as a shield as long as it meant his survival.
That was the only thing on his mind.
“!!”
He finally reached the cargo space.
The large space contained an avian Repliglass craft that reached fifteen meters across when its folded wings were spread out. The aerial Repliglass craft was known as a Seagull and it was meant for naval combat. He practically snapped at the men who approached from a different exit.
“Do you have the server!?”
“Right here!”
“Get it loaded on! Hurry up and load it!!”
After barking his order, Miyama Gouta operated the control panel next to him. The ceiling opened with a low rumble. At the same time, the entire floor slowly rose like a theatre contraption. The entire storage space was raised to the deck so the Seagull could be launched.
But their opponent did not wait for that to finish.
With a loud crash, one of the doors was broken through and a thoroughly destroyed Repliglass soldier rolled out. As the rising floor began to cover up the doorway, the summoner and her Material calmly stepped in through the closing gap.
The Chain state had ended.
But a new Artificial Sacred Ground enveloped everything.
Despair threatened to crush Miyama Gouta’s mind.
“Now.”
The vengeful demon named Biondetta smiled with her Blood-Sign resting on her shoulder.
“My client has been waiting on an empty stomach, so please let her enjoy the flavor of this perfectly aged meat.”

Part 3

“Found it.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke spoke from the deck of a Stingray racing at 200 kph across the ocean and between the pillars and buildings.
The smoke showed up more than the silhouette. Instead of catching up to the identical craft, their Stingray approached the other one by entering the same intersection on its left.
“What do you plan to do?” asked one of the Repliglass soldiers.
“Just crash into it. We’ll handle the rest.”
They could hear things whizzing by overhead. There was a lot on the lowest level of the city. Wires and crane hooks were dangling down from the bottoms of the countless giant bridges, parks, and schools.
Their frequency was growing.
The Stingray accelerated further.
And then the two came into contact as if crashing at the intersection.
A frightening impact threw Shiroyama Kyousuke and Isabelle from the deck.
Without the superhuman muscular strength and leg strength of the Repliglass, they were powerless. After being thrown like an artillery shell, Kyousuke held Isabelle in his arms to protect her and curled up his body.
They flew from one Stingray to the other.
They struck the deck and bounced a few times, but Kyousuke managed to stop his body while preventing the intense impact from causing too much damage.
They were on the flat surface of a stingray measuring several dozen meters across.
Inside the Artificial Sacred Ground, a waitress demon smiled while being served by a three meter mass of yellow slime.
Trapped in that cage were collapsed Repliglass soldiers, a Water Bear that likely contained Maria Heartocean, the Repliglass Seagull with folded wings, a large square box that likely contained the server abandoned next to the escape craft, and Miyama Gouta who had likely pulled the trigger on all of this.
“E-eek! H-help…*help me*…!!”
“…”
For just a moment, Kyousuke mechanically narrowed his eyes at those words, but…
“I’ll pay you!! I’ll give you a seat on the ark too!! So fight! Hurry up and fight! Isn’t that what you live for, you worthless hired hand from Freedom!?”

Kyousuke started to open his mouth, but before he could, Isabelle stood up next to him.
With no notable expression on her face, the girl in a red military uniform pressed her thumb against her throat. She noticed the thick and meaningless scent of blood hanging in the air.
And then she pulled her thumb sideways.
“Just super-sized die already.”
And she made an announcement as if to judge the culprit who had created this situation.
“Once you’ve died, I’ll save you.”
“But…!?”
Immediately after that contradictory suggestion, a tremor ran through the Stingray and Biondetta’s Artificial Sacred Ground entered its Chain state.
That also signaled the end of Miyama Gouta’s consciousness.
Normally, Kyousuke would have run into his opponent’s Artificial Sacred Ground to begin a new battle with no risk, but the waitress demon snapped her fingers and erased her own Artificial Sacred Ground.
The Original Yellow also vanished, revealing Murasame Kuina instead.
“…What are you doing?”
“My goal is assisting my client’s revenge, not pure destruction. And my client wishes to speak with your vessel. Think of this as a form of mental care to help her revenge run smoothly.”
Biondetta respectfully bowed and stepped to the side to give her client control of the scene.
That client, Murasame Kuina, faced Isabelle.
No, in this case…
“Sayuri, why did you come here?”
“My name is Isabelle and I came here to stop you.”
“…! I don’t know an Isabelle! You have no idea how ridiculous, cruel, hollow, painful, and heartbreaking it is to hear you use that name!! It’s seeing you like this that makes me want to at least hunt down the people who did this to you and send them to hell!!”
Hearing that, Isabelle slowly shook her head.
“You don’t understand.”
“Understand what!?”
“This is not who you are.”
“You can’t even remember your own name and you think you can talk about who *I* am!?”
“You still don’t get it?”
Isabelle looked troubled.
It was a sorrowful look.
It was the look of someone who could not bring themselves to say they were too busy to attend the birthday party their friend was so excited about.

And this was not just an issue of emotions or ideals. It was the look of someone who was reluctant to make some decisive statement, but knew they had to say it.
“Think back. What device did this all start with?”
“?”
“Girl’s Backdoor.”
“What? Why would you bring up those things we used as a diversion?”
“You still don’t get it?”
Isabelle repeated her question.
And before the bare midriff girl could feel a tremor down her spine, the answer was released into the world.
“You were made into the protagonist by that demon’s Girl’s Backdoor.”
Murasame Kuina, that girl of vengeance, came to a complete stop as her thoughts ground to a halt.
“It’s true you may have had a small-sized desire for revenge in the beginning.”
So Isabelle did not stop speaking.
“For one thing, once I became a vessel, my very existence would have been erased from your mind. If Biondetta hadn’t contacted you, you may not have ever remembered.”
No one else stopped her.
“However, a desire for revenge alone is not the same thing as acting on it.”
She spoke the cruel truth.
“But what if Biondetta read what you wanted and manipulated your actions? What if she used an invisible hand to send you on a path you would have never dared to take normally?”
She simply presented it to the girl.
“You were only taking revenge due to the Girl’s Backdoor’s manipulation. You merely misinterpreted it as your own actions. A single summoner has been putting on a play this entire time.”
At first, Murasame Kuina had been manipulated from without.
Because she was acting based on the deepest thoughts in her heart, she had assumed those actions were based in her own will.
But in truth, Kuina’s desires had never left the realm of thought and the actions were created by a third party manipulating her body.
During a long, long life, anyone might feel the desire to punch or kill someone at some point.
But very few could and would actually go through with it.
At the very least, Murasame Kuina had not been one of those people.
But someone else had smiled and been very careful to make sure she never noticed that.
“You’re…lying.”
Kuina forced out the words like they were caught in her throat.
More than a rebuttal, she was trying to throw back something she refused to believe.

“I mean, you gain nothing from telling me that supposed ‘truth’ here! But to protect Government, you probably would lie about it in order to disturb us and throw off our teamwork! So!!”
“It would probably be faster if I demonstrated our stance here.”
With that casual comment, Kyousuke grabbed a nearby lever.
It was used to secure any wheeled containers to the deck while the Stingray moved at 200 kph.
He did not hesitate to pull the lever.
With a loud thunk, something was removed. A container slid across the deck. No one could stop it as it plunged into the ocean.
That was the Anthill server.
It had contained the important data crucial for the continuation of the project.
“Wha-…?”
“The request I received from Isabelle was to free Murasame Kuina from her unnecessary revenge. No more, no less. *What Government wants doesn’t matter.* The Anthills? Those disgusting things are better off destroyed. We were only selling ourselves to Government because it helped us accomplish our goal.”
“That means we have no reason to lie to you to protect Government.” The military uniform girl stared straight at Murasame Kuina. “*From the very beginning, we were super-sized fighting to save you from that demon.*”
Finally, Murasame Kuina turned toward Biondetta like a broken doll.
The waitress demon simply smiled.
“What…is the meaning of this?”
She asked the obvious question.
“Hey, you! Is Sayuri telling the truth about-…!?”
“Ma’am.”
Even with the truth revealed, Biondetta did not bat an eye and maintained her perfect salesman’s smile.
And at some point, her thin waitress’s glove had melted away as if from a great heat.
Her white fingertips were briefly visible, but they soon turned black.
But not because they had been burned and scorched.
The skin of her left hand peeled away on its own, revealing the leather glove below. Was the sticky-sounding glove fused with the real, skinless palm further below?

Nevertheless, Biondetta formed a handgun and aimed the index finger barrel at her client.
And the demon spoke with a smile.
“This is the very best part, so kindly shut the hell up☆”
That was all it took for Murasame Kuina’s entire body to go stiff and then go limp.
The light vanished from her eyes and all human expression vanished from her face.
She looked like a doll controlled by thin threads and with its limbs trapped in countless bear traps.
The tree-style flowchart had arrived at an unexpected situation and switched to a different line.
It was all an act and it was all restricted.
Biondetta had only wanted to borrow someone else’s revenge to satisfy her own sadistic desires. By approaching someone with a kind smile, gently fanning the flames of their vengeful desires, and providing them the means and opportunity to fulfill them, she gained an excuse for all sorts of violence.
And this was the perfect and ultimate shortcut.
Girl’s Backdoor.
She manipulated people to their destruction in order to fulfill her own desires. She truly was a demon.
She claimed she was simply obeying her client, but she was actually enjoying the greatest front row seat.
“From the very beginning…”
At first, Kyousuke and Isabelle had known Kuina had sworn revenge for her friend and begun acting on it, but they had not known who had invited her to take revenge. But no matter who stood by her side, they had guessed there was a decent risk of this possibility.
It came down to Girl’s Backdoor.
What if there was no distinction between the controller and the controlled? It was not a straight line or a pyramid. This was controlling someone else while hoping they became the perfect master. There was a Mobius-like *twist* that blurred the distinction between master and servant.
“You had planned for this. This was not just one of many possibilities. Murasame Kuina learning the truth was built in as an unavoidable step no matter what happened. It was necessary if you were to pit Kuina and Isabelle against each other.”
“Well, of course.” Biondetta laughed just like the Queen she had once seen. “Her desire for revenge has a safety built in. I want her to burn down the entire world, but she has so many conditions about what she refuses to do. *But if I have her destroy the very source of those limitations,* I figure nothing will be able to stop her revenge.”
In other words, Murasame Kuina would kill Isabelle – who she most wanted to protect – in the pursuit of her revenge.

Biondetta would dirty Kuina's hands by forcing her to kill the girl.
That had been the ultimate joy in her mind as she had built the Girl's Backdoor devices. That had been the thought in her mind as she smiled next to her client from the earliest stages of their plan.
She would gorge herself on the feast before her eyes, shove all the blame onto the girl, and then swallow up even the girl she had used as a scapegoat.
Kyousuke pulled his Blood-Sign from his back.
"*You* are completely insane."
"Completely insane? This? Nothing more than this!? We have felt the Queen's insanity in person, so you must know this is no more than a trivial little prank!!"
"I'm super-sized pissed right now. Bulge bulge (deadpan)."
"I don't mind at all. *I will bring my client's revenge further than she ever imagined.* I don't mind if the sight of the horrific results leaves my client in tears and drives her to suicide. All that matters is that I enjoy myself."
With that, Biondetta spread her feet to shoulder width.
She shook her tail and an Incense Grenade clunked down from her miniskirt.
"And with Girl's Backdoor, our summoner-vessel combination is, in a way, greater than any other. The combat routines I have given my client are second to none. Now, let me enjoy this, *you damn rabbit. You* are likely the most satisfying meal for this revenge!!"
With that yell, the grenade detonated and an Artificial Sacred Ground covered their surroundings.

Part 4

In that instant, Murasame Kuina felt an explosion of the intense pain that she had been programmed to "forget".
The red threads and hands that were only visible to the attacker and victim – the controller and the controlled – tore into her arms, legs, and torso like bear traps. Her body accurately followed a programmed flowchart and tree-style command list.
As her body moved, she vaguely looked out at the world.
What had she been doing all this time?
She may have been commanded not to question it. Even so, why had she never questioned it even once?
Over the course of a lifetime, one might hate someone enough to kill them.

But why had that led her to *actually* kill them?
Why had she been so willing to use the Girl's Backdoor that any teenage girl should have loathed?
Yes.
It was almost like she had not been moving her own body. Hadn't it been more like someone else had grabbed her arms and legs and moved them to fulfill that desire?
And it had led here.
To Isabelle…no, to Kawamo Sayuri.
This revenge had been for her. It was a way of getting back at the people who had hurt her. So why did Kuina have to confront her like this?
(My…revenge?)
She was only able to think for herself now because Biondetta had made sure she could.
The equation had been thoroughly rearranged to show her this despair.
(Taking my own desire beyond what I had imagined…leads to killing Sayuri?)
She wanted to shake her head, but she could not.
She had never said that, but Biondetta's actions were being made into the girl's intentions. All of the limits they had crossed so far were being blamed on Kuina as necessary sacrifices.
Meanwhile, the summoner trapped in the Artificial Sacred Ground and the blonde girl next to him said something else.
"To hell with that."
"Yes, I know that this Murasame Kuina person doesn't want this! Not even a small-sized bit!!"
Those words shattered the waitress demon's whispers.
Her friend, someone she had supposedly been separated from on ideological grounds, had more to say.
"So help my friend! Save her from that demon!!"
"My answer is of course, as you wish. I'm sick of Biondetta's little play."
The battle was beginning.
Murasame Kuina could do nothing because she was still being controlled.
She could only draw out all of her awful strength as that smiling demon commanded.
But even if she was forbidden to move a single eye, that girl's soul was surely crying.

Part 5

The twenty meter Artificial Sacred Ground was set up.
The three-dimensional Rose made up of 216 Petals appeared at the midpoint between the two summoner pairs.
As the glowing White Thorns appeared in the empty air, Kyousuke and Biondetta jabbed their Blood-Signs into them.
The Rose was smashed and 36 dark, fist-sized Spots appeared in the empty air.
The scattering Petals ricocheted around and a few of them fell into the Spots.
“Isabelle!!”
“Ma’am.”
The two girls changed form on the rapidly-moving Stingray’s deck.
Kyousuke had the Original Yellow (s). Sound Range: High. Cost: 1.
Biondetta had the Original Red (b). Sound Range: Low. Cost: 1.
(I have the upper hand in the sound range, but that does not matter.)
When she had the upper hand, Biondetta only had to “wait”. Victory would come to her on its own.
That meant Kyousuke had to take action. After he used a White Thorn to knock the desired Petal into a Spot to change his Material’s sound range, the waitress demon made her next move.
She followed suit and she mimicked him with stalker-like precision.
If he chose the middle sound range, she too chose middle.
If he chose low, she too chose low.
Kyousuke made feints, double feints, and every trick he could find, but Biondetta only had to follow suit after “seeing it for herself”. By taking the same sound range with a constant +1 in cost and always summoning her Material after him, she always had the newer and stronger one.
It was like repeatedly comparing benchmarks with a computer from the same company, the same brand, and the same line but one generation older.
(This is enough. If this is a game of chicken, then I have a distance handicap. He can’t wait until I’m right up on the edge before slamming on the brakes. If he tries that, he’ll drive right off the cliff.)
Of course, Kyousuke would have noticed this was the “first cage”.
But that knowledge did not allow him to ignore it. Even if this was only bait or a diversion, he would still lose if the Silhouette at his Material’s core was destroyed.
So he could not reach past it.
He could only wait for her to finish.
“!”
Shiroyama Kyousuke must have lost his temper because he charged toward her like a bullet.
Was he starting a close-quarters exchange like last time?
There was no point in a fistfight between summoners when they had their protective circles. But they could hit, deflect, and push at the Blood-Sign

that stuck out and that could throw off the accuracy of their opponent's shots.
However…
"Hee hee."
Biondetta could not help but laugh.
They glared at each other from less than a meter away, sometimes attacking each other's Blood-Signs with staff or spear techniques and sometimes finding a chance to launch a White Thorn. All the while, the waitress demon spoke.
"You are correct to take away my resources, but if you lose the same amount of resources in the process, my advantage remains. Thus, you cannot escape this cage☆"
"…!!"
A White Thorn that had seemed to fly way off the mark made a sharp curve in midair and collided with the target Petal. Instead of hitting the center, she had intentionally put a major spin on the ball.
"And you still do not know my true power."
A high-pitched sound filled the air.
"I am only restricting myself to this speed so I can match your speed and follow your lead. If I release my spare resources, I can do this."
Biondetta's Blood-Sign briefly bent in two.
And she touched the sniper trigger.
With a loud bang, a 7.62mm rifle bullet was released from the center point.
It could not reach the summoner inside his protective circle.
However, she had not targeted his Blood-Sign either.
Biondetta scored a direct hit on something beyond Kyousuke: the clashing monsters.
The Materials.
"There are some exceptions, but the Materials summoned using the Blood-Sign system – especially the Regulation-class – are generally quite dumb."
She reconnected her Blood-Sign and smiled.
At this point, Kyousuke had the SSC for Puppet #2000 (yi – a – ns – ou – wh – ia – iu – seb – e – hig – o – sd – c – li – dr – oq). Sound range: Low. Cost: 30.
It was a giant western suit of armor with countless red strings wrapped around it and it turned their way after the hit from the rifle bullet.
"Whether it's a peashooter or whatever else, they will set their sights on whatever attacked them. So it isn't hard to manipulate the enemy."
An explosive sound reached their ears.
Biondetta only had to take one step to the side.
The attack could easily have split open an aircraft carrier flight deck like it was a can. A row of violent steel spikes missed their target and fiercely struck Shiroyama Kyousuke who was supposed to be its master.
He was not killed thanks to the protective circle, but the great strength sent him and the circle flying like a pinwheel.
He was not injured and he felt no impact or pain.

But his position had shifted.
And that widened the gap.
“Gh…Cheshire Cat…!!”
“Shut up, *you damn rabbit*. I can control my allies with Girl’s Backdoor and my enemies with my sniper shots, so I can dance across the board with everything under my control. Do you really think *a lone summoner* can stop me?”
Kyousuke had not even broken out of the first cage formed by her “same sound range with cost +1” strategy.
Now she formed the second cage by indirectly interfering with his Material using her rifle bullets. The wider the gap grew and the more freedom she gained, the more resources she could spare to end it all.
She would complete the third cage.
That greatest and worst arrangement of dominos would sweep everything away and swallow it all up when it all came tumbling down.
(I need to reach the Divine-class using the high sound range and with a cost of 10. I need that dog-headed god that gained a new name and power after mixing the Ancient Egyptian god of judgment with Hermes of Greece.)
Inside the ten meter cube of the Artificial Sacred Ground, most of the White Thorns and Petals were moving near the deck of the high-speed Stingray.
No, Biondetta had set it up that way.
The only exceptions were near the corners, walls, and ceiling of the giant cube. Clusters of three or four Petals had gathered there.
And there were more than one or two such clusters.
They were spread out like a spider web or like a jellyfish or sea anemone’s antennae drifting in wait of prey.
The countless clusters were complete and they surrounded the poor summoner.
“Farewell, my barrier.”
She sent out *the signal to surpass Shiroyama Kyousuke* who was still stuck in the Regulation-class.
This was the sweet flavor of revenge.
This was the moment when she turned the tables on a target who was confident he would never die. And not as a coincidence. This was the joy of tearing down their strength, their reputation, and their happiness thanks to her careful planning.
This was the pleasure of strapping a giant rocket engine to a scooter one third its size just to show up a braggart driving around in their Italian luxury car.
Biondetta felt a strange tremor run down her spine.
“You could not reach me. Like this, you are not even worth calling *a damn rabbit*. You knew about this cage, but you were not skilled enough to interfere. You deserve to be crushed by overwhelming quantity and speed!!”

She held her Blood-Sign vertically, aimed straight down, and launched a White Thorn. It collided with the deck at her feet, bounced off, and used its intense spin to fly in a sharp curve.
End this.
Sink into despair.
Fall to your knees and sob.
And at the same moment…
“Oh, I wouldn’t be so sure of that.”
Shiroyama Kyousuke left every last pattern Biondetta had imagined. He was still calm. His face had not gone pale, his eyes were not wandering aimlessly, sweat did not cover his face, and the parts of his face had not gathered in the center like a dried plum.
It was meaningless like this.
Revenge was more than just destruction. The true essence of revenge was how much that destruction tore into the target’s heart.
“Let me tell you something very basic, *Cheshire Cat. You* might think that you have indirect control over both Materials and that you control every Petal on the field, but you’re forgetting one basic fact. We’re on top of a Government Stingray, so this is a giant away game for you. *You* are the avenger, so you should have assumed everything around you could turn against you.”
“What…are you…?”
Two ricochets. Three ricochets.
The White Thorn bounced off the walls of the Artificial Sacred Ground and accurately targeted the desired Petal. Kyousuke knew the fuse has been lit, but the problem before his eyes kept him too busy to interfere.
Or so Biondetta had thought.
But if that was the case, why did Alice (with) Rabbit look so confident!?
“*You* may have felt like a queen peering into the bug cage, but *you* were trapped in a larger bird cage all the while.”
“What are you talking about, *you goddamn rabbit*? This is already over! I have you in checkmate, so feel some despair!! I’ve taken your king, so don’t just keep playing!! Tormenting you once you’re a dead-eyed zombie would just be boring!!!!!”
Five ricochets. Six ricochets.
Biondetta’s White Thorn slipped between the unwanted Petals on its way to the one that acted as a trigger. No one could stop it now. Once her Material reached the Divine-class, it would obliterate Kyousuke’s which could not leave the Regulation-class.
“What I’m saying is…”
Unbelievably, Kyousuke brought his Blood-Sign to a stop.
He snapped his fingers just as something shot by over his head.
“That’s my line.”
It happened a moment later.

With a solid sound, Biondetta's seemingly unstoppable White Thorn was struck from the side.
"Wha-…?"
Kyousuke had not launched a White Thorn of his own.
Countless crane wires dangled down from the giant bridges or midair surfaces that supported parks, hospitals, schools, etc. As the Stingray moved at 200 kph, they were essentially a raging steel wind blowing by overhead. One of the J-shaped hooks had accurately struck Biondetta's White Thorn.
"Did you forget our field is constantly in motion? And this isn't a natural phenomenon. It's being controlled by Government, who *you* made into an enemy."
The single attack caused it all to fall apart.
"The Petals and White Thorns will bounce when they hit the Artificial Sacred Ground's walls or another obstacle. Anything directly controlled by a human will, be it a thrown stone or a fired bullet, will pass through them, but that doesn't apply here. While the field's movement is controlled by a human will, the crane wire is simply hanging there."
The White Thorn was not the only thing knocked out of place.
A great number of crane wires of various sizes tore apart the Petals that had been accurately positioned for a domino effect. They scattered everywhere and ruined Biondetta's beautifully completed diagram.
Or so it seemed.
But that was not the case.
"And *you* did quite well."
A solid sound followed.
The shock had created a brief gap in which Biondetta stopped moving. The first cage, created by the same sound range +1, crumbled away. Kyousuke used that opening to launch a White Thorn to a distant location.
He sent it toward the remains of Biondetta's crumbled setup.
But he was not just hitting a few Petals into the Spots at random.
One of the clusters collapsed.
Those scattered Petals collided with other clusters.
Several clusters collapsed.
They spread out like a spider web and surrounded Biondetta as a dance of red lines. All of the Petals shot toward the Spots.
Almost as if…
"What…is this? I didn't plan this. I don't remember creating this domino effect!"
The dominos had not been swept aside by a brutish hand.
They had shifted from Domino Structure A to Domino Structure B.
Had they been accurately swapped out for a completely different formation!?
"Of course you don't. I was the one to guide it in this direction."
"——————"

“Did you think you had created that situation yourself and for your own victory? You were only creating the basis I needed for my victory. Like the worker bee that busily gathers honey, oblivious to the bear waiting to raid the hive.”
He had been aiming for this from the beginning.
He had pretended to fall for her trap.
The data on the evacuation operation may have provided how many obstacles there were in Toy Dream 35, but the second Stingray’s presence had been an outright rebellion against his plan. That data would never have told him what route it would be taking.
But that had not mattered.
He had perfectly put together the algorithm in this short time, he had perfectly predicted the route and speed they would use based on what he would do in their position, and he had even used Biondetta who was at the 900s level.
He had been looking to this moment from the beginning.
Everything else had been how to *manipulate* things into arriving at this situation.
(Oh, no!! At this rate, he’ll take my Divine-class!!)
Biondetta immediately read the arrangement of Petals inside the Artificial Sacred Ground and launched a new White Thorn. When it hit Kyousuke’s Thorn, threw it off course, and prevented him from building up his Material, she could cut into the domino layout and steal its benefits for herself.
“This isn’t over yet, *you damn rabbit*!! I can use this to reach the Divine-class too!! And then-…”
She trailed off.
Shiroyama Kyousuke’s expression remained unchanged.
It was just like when she had setup her dominos and achieved checkmate… no, thought she had achieved checkmate.
“It can’t be…”
She realized something.
“This was…exactly what you wanted me to do…?”

Part 6

The situation took a decisive turn before Shiroyama Kyousuke’s eyes.
They continued fighting over the Petals and building up their Materials, but that would not last forever.
The undeniable result was eventually revealed to them.

Kyousuke had a Divine-class of the middle sound range with a cost of 9. It was the Celtic god of hunting and ruler of the underworld. The fierce male god had a pair of animal horns as a symbol of life.
As for Biondetta…
“I didn’t…reach it?”
She had the King of Serpents with an Indestructible Body which Repeatedly Sheds Its Skin in Front of All Calamity (b f – h a t l – e i – v o – o u – d v – e I – b c – I u – j k v – a – j o k – l v – n i c – a – y x – v j z).
Sound Range: Low. Cost: 38.
But…
“I’m still in the Regulation-class… I didn’t reach the Divine-class…!?”
Biondetta’s looked more powerful based on its physical appearance.
One was muscular, but only a two meter man. The other was a giant red snake that one had to look up at even when it was coiled up.
But that did not matter.
It would all be over with the swing of an arm.
There was an overwhelming power difference between the Regulation-class and the Divine-class.
“How did you end up like this?”
The Celtic god took a step forward.
Shiroyama Kyousuke was already resting his Blood-Sign on his shoulder. He was implicitly saying he no longer needed it.
“It’s true the Fifteen Siblings Project was the worst. Everyone who took part received great talent in exchange for leaving the proper path in some way. But *you’re* the only one that turned out like this, *Cheshire Cat*. …How did you turn into the revenge-obsessed Liar Cat? What did *you* see in that Queen’s Miniature Garden?”
“…ause…”
The red snake that formed a great mountain squirmed as if overpowered by that overwhelming presence.
Similarly, the demon named Biondetta took a step back from Kyousuke’s gaze.
“…Because you were the only one…”
She spoke in a daze.
It was unclear if her eyes were viewing at the present or the past.
“We learned of the Queen’s hatred, the Queen’s ferocity, the Queen’s allure, and the Queen’s passion. Our original families betrayed us, sold us, and abandoned us. We had no friends in that cramped miniature garden, all of the adults were cruel, the social structure was shallow, and our sibling bonds were only artificial so we couldn’t even trust in them…”
Her fragmentary words would only make sense to someone who had shared that time with her.
“But you were the only one who received real love. Even if it did come from that hideous and loathsome Queen!!”
“…”

Shiroyama Kyousuke – Alice (with) Rabbit – narrowed his eyes slightly.
Every last person who had taken part…no, been forced to take part in the Fifteen Siblings Project had become a monster. A family is kind, a teacher is right, a friend is fun, and a lover is warm. They received none of those standard feelings. Their initial presets had been wrong, so they could not understand the concept of finding comfort in a family.
How could they have found happiness after being thrown out into the world to do as they pleased? How could they fit in when their "normal" was so very twisted from everyone else's "normal"?
And why had Kyousuke alone not broken like the rest of them?
This must have been the answer Biondetta had found.
Pandora's Box had contained all forms of calamity, but hope alone had remained inside it.
Was she saying that Shiroyama Kyousuke alone had received that hope?
That was why she had wanted to take revenge. She had wanted to take revenge, but the Queen's Miniature Garden had been destroyed, the adults were gone, and the White Queen was too powerful. Had she been going around destroying all of the nearby targets to soothe her heart and that had eventually led her back to Kyousuke?
This battle came down to one thing.
Had they accepted "that" as the one last thread of hope given to them?
Or had they rejected "that" as salt in the wound?
This was the story of two artificial siblings who had made the opposite decision.
And with all that in mind, Shiroyama Kyousuke spoke coldly as if to correct a mistake.
"You're imagining all that."
He was answered with a great cry that was too halfhearted to call a roar or a scream.
The demon's insane fighting spirit had been reignited.
She knew she had no way of winning, but she raised her Blood-Sign regardless.
Shiroyama Kyousuke did not respond in kind.
<How sad,> said Isabelle.
"You can say that again. The fifteen of us all received the Queen's fear and nothing more. The only difference was how we interpreted it, but how in the world did she mistake that for love?"
<That is not even a small-sized bit what I meant.>
Kyousuke briefly had trouble figuring out what Isabelle meant.
At any rate, this was checkmate.
He only had to say one thing to his vessel and partner who had become a horned Celtic god.
"Do it, Isabelle."
It took one attack.

With a disconcerting sound, the male horned god's hand tore apart the red snake. Hit by the shock of seeing their god slaughtered before their eyes, the summoner and vessel collapsed to the Stingray's deck.

Facts

- If you are prepared to pay an adequate penalty, it is possible to force your way into an Artificial Sacred Ground in which a battle is underway.
- Murasame Kuina's initial desire for revenge was real, but all of her actions were manipulated by Girl's Backdoor. That was the true reason for Isabelle's request to save her friend from that needless revenge.
- A Material will prioritize counterattacking whoever attacks it. It does not matter whether or not that attack did any damage. It is possible for the vessel's will to correct the targeting cursor, but the Material still takes an unnecessary action.
- The Petals and White Thorns are influenced by and bounce off of field objects. This is true even if those objects are in motion. But a thrown stone, a fired bullet, or anything else directly influenced by a human are an exception. Also, a human, an animal, or anything else with a soul does not count as a field object.
- Normally, people cannot move freely in and out of the Artificial Sacred Ground, but field objects have no such restriction. They can pass through the wall just like the losers after they pass out.
- Biondetta actually wanted to take revenge on Shiroyama Kyousuke and the White Queen, but not even she noticed until she was truly cornered.
- Shiroyama Kyousuke insists that the love he alone supposedly received from the White Queen was in Biondetta's imagination.

Ending X-01: The Girls’ Slight Hope

「サユリ!　お待たせ、時間ってピッタリだったわよね?」

「ぬーん（棒）、イザベルはそんな名前じゃない」

(Ending X-01 Open 05/24 10:00)

エンディングX-01

少女達のわずかな希望

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Sayuri! I’m here. Right on time, aren’t I?”
“Nuuun (deadpan). My name is Isabelle.”
(Ending X-01 Open 05/24 10:00)
The Girls’ Slight Hope

The night came to an end.
Isabelle, the girl in a red military uniform, was in a park of Toy Dream 35’s P Block.
Shiroyama Kyousuke had agreed to meet her here, but he had not shown up. The pumpkin costume and Oni girl around her were walking and chatting, but time seemed to have stopped where she was.
Despite the crowds, she was left to stand alone in front of a fountain, but then her cellphone range.
“Nuuun (deadpan)? Where are you?”
“Nearby. This will all be over soon.”
Kyousuke sounded the same as always.
“You don’t need to worry about Murasame Kuina. At the very least, she won’t be manipulated by Biondetta and she won’t be turned into a toy for revenge as a vessel.”
“Did you use that Girl’s Backdoor?”
“No, they were defeated in a battle with a summoner, so I could guide them using the shock of seeing their god killed. I gave Biondetta two instructions: end your contract with Murasame Kuina and surrender to Government. Binding such a complex contract would be impossible in that mindless state, but ending one is doable. …At the very least, the incident concerning the Anthills should be over.”
“I super-sized want to know what’s going to happen to Murasame Kuina.”
“You’ll have to ask her about that one. She was being controlled by Biondetta throughout her entire quest for revenge, so she can force that through and get an acquittal. But if she wants to be punished, then I don’t think doing that would qualify as saving her. That said, it wouldn’t really be right to dig up a desire for punishment now that her contract was cancelled and she’s forgotten everything.”
“…”
Isabelle fell silent for a moment.
Her expression did not look at home in a morning park.
“I don’t understand even a small-sized bit what happiness is.”
“Neither do I. I feel like I’ve been wondering that all my life.”
Kyousuke spat out the words and then changed the subject.
“I would also like to solve another problem.”
“?”
“Murasame Kuina…your friend is no longer a vessel, so she’s back to being a normal person. That might sound like a happy ending, but it isn’t really. Your problem remains.”

“You mean…?”
“You’re still Alice (with) Rabbit’s vessel. *As a normal person*, Murasame Kuina will forget about you the instant she looks away. …We can’t have that, can we? If we end this like that, I don’t think we’ve really saved Murasame Kuina.”
“But if you end our contract…”
“Yes, you’ll forget about me. Until you see me again or bind a contract with a new summoner.”
He readily admitted it.
He sounded like he had said goodbye this way many times before.
“I spoke with Government about it. You don’t need to be manipulated by the Anthill Project any longer. I can’t turn you back into Kawamo Sayuri, but Isabelle won’t have to have anything more taken from her.”
“Wait.”
“I’m not waiting.”
“I super-sized want you to wait!!”
“ ‘Help my friend.’ …Who said that? Sorry, but you alone aren’t my top priority. I’m going to think about what’s best for both you and Murasame Kuina.”
Isabelle heard a slight noise.
Someone stood beyond the crowd.
It was Shiroyama Kyousuke.
It was the white rabbit who would guide a girl to the exit once she wandered into another world.
He lightly bit his right index finger so a drop of blood appeared and he held that fingertip out toward Isabelle.
He could see her with the naked eye.
He pointed at her.
Isabelle realized that was the sign of blood that released a summoner and vessel from their contract.
“What about you?”
“What about me?”
“What are you going to do once you save me?”
“I don’t know.”
Kyousuke answered with a faint, faint smile that she was unsure how to describe.
“What *do* I want to do?”
A transparent sound seemed to ring deep in her head.
The next thing she knew, Isabelle could not remember why she was standing here.
(Oh, right. I was meeting someone here.)
She quickly looked through the crowd filling the morning park.
She was looking for a familiar face in a desperate attempt to remember who it was.
And…

And…
And…
“Sayuri! I’m here. Right on time, aren’t I?”
When a voice reached her from the side and someone grabbed her slender hand, Isabelle finally remembered.
Yes.
That was right.
Hadn’t she been waiting for her friend Murasame Kuina?
“Nuuun (deadpan). My name is Isabelle.”
“Yes, yes. I don’t know if you’re trying to make a new impression in middle school or if it’s your screenname, but I guess I’ll go along with it. What should we do today? Let’s start by going around to the shopping district’s accessory shops. At lunchtime, we can find a restaurant somewhere. And after that…well, we can figure it out as we go!”
As the girl tugged on her arm, Isabelle vanished into the crowd. She became a part of the crowd and a part of normal society. In turn, she distanced herself from the world of the Summoning Ceremony.
As she spoke with her friend, she looked around just once.
But she did not see any other familiar faces among all the similar-looking faces of the crowd.

“…”
Kyousuke watched as Isabelle disappeared into the crowd.
He did not speak a word.
He did not wave.
He only wished for her safety, turned his back, and left the park through a different exit.

Facts

- Shiroyama Kyousuke won the summoner battle and hit Biondetta with the shock of seeing her god killed in front of her. With Biondetta in a mindless daze, he ordered her to end her contract with Murasame Kuina and to surrender to Government. The complex process of binding a contract would not be possible, but it apparently is possible to have someone like that end a contract.

- As a result, Shiroyama Kyousuke never once used the Girl’s Backdoor during this incident. Most likely, he is the only one who understands why he maintained that inefficient restriction.
- By ending the contract, Murasame Kuina forgot all about the incident. And since Government placed all the blame on Biondetta for creating the tree-style flowchart, Kuina will apparently be treated like a victim from the normal population.
- Kyousuke ended his contract with Isabelle, so she lost her memories as well.
- The two girls turned their backs on the world of the Summoning Ceremony and disappeared into the light.
- Being selfish is fine as long as it will save someone.

Ending X-02: A Demonstration of the White Queen’s True Character

「絶望なさい、城山恭介」

「たとえ真理(それ)を知ったところで、

『白き女王』を倒せる可能性など万に一つもないのですが」

(Ending X-02 Open 05/23 19:30 Attention! "Reverse count")

エンディングX-02

白き女王、本領の発揮

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“Feel despair, Shiroyama Kyousuke.”
“Even if you do learn the truth, you have not even a one in a million chance of defeating the White Queen.”
(Ending X-02 Open 05/23 19:30 Attention! “Reverse Count”)
A Demonstration of the White Queen’s True Character

It was 7:30 PM of the previous day.
Freedom Award 920, Liar Cat, aka Biondetta Shiroyama had just been defeated on the deck of the Repliglass Stingray.
With the defeat of that sole threat, the Stingray and its evacuation operation had no reason to continue. It was now stopped and rocking in the waves below Toy Dream 35’s high-rise buildings.
Several Repliglass soldier were putting out fires and rescuing people on the badly damaged deck. A great variety of tools were scattered about: fire hoses, stretchers, first aid kits, and firefighting axes for breaking through bent doors.
In the midst of all that, Maria Heartocean spoke cheerfully after removing her Water Bear.
“Looks like everything’s finally settling down.”
Her life had been targeted, her many Government bodyguards had been defeated, and Kyousuke had thrown her crucial server into the ocean, but she did not seem bothered by any of it.
Kyousuke winked.
“We saved your life and destroyed that classified information in exchange. I’m not sure that’s a fair trade, but I’m from selfish Freedom and I accepted the job from Isabelle, not you.”
He was not telling her to accept it.
He was only saying that any complaints would lead to round 2.
“Oh, I know that. You’re with Freedom and I’m with Government. Of course we have different principles. And I was well aware it would come back to bite me in some way if I tried to ask for help from a group of eccentrics who could easily destroy the world in their pursuit of personal freedom.”
“…”
“Also, this outcome wasn’t all that bad for me. …But you knew that, didn’t you?”
“You mean you *didn’t want to continue* the Anthill Project? For the supposed world police, I did think Government had agreed to an awful lot of plans that would end up sacrificing you. Did you want to be taken out by Biondetta’s revenge?”
“Well, it was never anything more than a way of drawing in funding for my soul research which has no end in sight.”
Maria gave a self-deprecating smile.
“I thought showing a theoretical possibility would be enough…but wouldn’t you know it? I underestimated the greed of the higher ups. The next thing I

knew, the gigantic steel ball was rolling and I was too weak to stop it alone. I had started rolling the snowball down the hill, so it would've been silly to be crushed by it. I really was at my wit's end."
Maria Heartocean stopped speaking there.
Her eyes narrowed as she looked at a small girl in a military uniform who was working with the Government soldiers to wrap bandages around the arms and legs of the wounded.
"How am I supposed to apologize to those children?"
"You can spend the rest of your life on that question. At the very least, I say anyone who has a shot at a second chance in life should count themselves lucky."
He seemed to be implying he had not been one of those people
The two of them fell silent for a while.
Finally, Maria spoke up again while toying with the bolo tie at her chest.
"Then instead of confessing my sins, can I tell you something? My sins are something only someone who can follow my research can understand."
"What is it?"
"To start with, the higher ups were so fixated on the Anthills because they saw them as *more than* just a stable way of mass-producing vessels. They were interested in the ability to tune someone's soul to increase their compatibility with a specific Unexplored-class. To the point that they can hold a one-on-one conversation just like a certain someone can."
"…"
For a moment, pure white evil slipped into the back of Shiroyama Kyousuke's mind, but…
"Oh, no, no. It isn't that. It is true we used the remains of the Queen's Miniature Garden to construct this project, but that wasn't our aim this time. The Unexplored-class we were after wasn't the White Queen."
"Then what was it?"
"Government's Protector as one of the Three," said Maria.
That was a Material with an exceptional legend different from that of the White Queen.
"The 'Red-Eyed' Lady who Sees Through all Sin and Calamity (f a – a o – a b – e i – f j – c i b – b – d u – a – e i f)."
Maria tossed him something.
It looked like a smartphone, but it was not. It was likely a device built from scratch in a Government research facility rather than a commercial product.
"If you use that, you can hold a pseudo-conversation with the Red Lady kept in a stable state within the Box…Anyway, the mechanical prompt just wasn't enough. The higher ups decided that a human mind and mouth are needed to process it."
"Kept in a stable state within the Box…?"
It hit Kyousuke after he repeated her words.
He realized the true identity of the supposed server he had thrown into the sea.

“You don’t mean…!?”
“Well, after what you did, who can say how long it will last. The system might have already been destroyed, but I’ll give you the chance. You’re at a dead-end when it comes to the White Queen, aren’t you? Then it might not be a bad idea to rely on a superhuman mind. And luck would have it, the Three are well known for *taking extremely good care of mankind.*”
With that said, Maria waved and walked off.
Left alone, Kyousuke stared at the device in his hand for a while.
With that, he could reach a fragment of knowledge beyond human reach?
He could contact a being with an “easy to grasp” intelligence who had become one of the Three because she actually *wanted* to protect a human organization?
Could he receive information on the White Queen’s identity, traits, and weaknesses *from a nonhuman viewpoint*?
“…”
He realized his fingers were trembling.
He had trouble controlling those fingers, but he managed to press the small button.
Light filled the screen.
The next thing he knew, something like a hologram appeared before his eyes.
The world had changed.
The Red Lady’s actual body looked like a pale girl of about eighteen. She wore red lacquered geta on her feet, so she may not have been as tall as she looked. She had endlessly long red hair and a maple pattern kimono that had no obi and was left fully open in the front. Inside that, she wore something like a one-piece swimsuit colored the same shade of red.
Two horns protruded sharply from her forehead.
Her red eyes provided the frightening impression that one glance would send all calamity your way…no, define all calamity around you. But those eyes were currently hidden behind smooth eyelids.
And in addition to her actual body, a set of frighteningly massive interlocking gears could be seen behind her. They glistened as if from lacquer and they were made of wood. They looked like giant tropical flowers and like a loom that weaved the threads of destiny and lifespan for all things. And red threads that looked like laser beams extended in every direction from the giant gears. A closer look showed that those red threads were actually her endlessly long hair. That seemed to show that she ruled over destiny itself.
Simply put, she was the “Red-Eyed” Lady who Sees Through all Sin and Calamity.
She was not on the White Queen’s level, but she was one of the Unexplored-class as well as one of the Three who did not hesitate to lend their power to humans.

Shiroyama Kyousuke gulped in front of this image that was easily larger than twenty meters, making it larger than the standard Artificial Sacred Ground.
He was unsure what to say.
A wrong choice here could negatively affect the battle with the White Queen that was surely coming. He had nothing to base that on, but he clearly understood it as true.
“…Can you hear me?”
The puny summoner finally made up his mind and spoke to the higher being.
“Can you hear what I’m saying, Red Lady?”
The girl in the half-worn kimono slowly turned her head.
The eyes that brought ruin remained closed.
<You are Shiroyama Kyousuke, aren’t you? You are one of ‘those children’ and the one loved by the White Queen. Yes, I have heard much about you even here.>
Kyousuke was not entirely sure what “here” meant.
Were the Materials not alone in the other world where they drifted? Did they have some form of community that allowed them to exchange information? How? For what purpose? Using what language? At what level of intelligence? Were there walls between the Regulation-, Divine-, and Unexplored-classes? His human logic was not enough to picture it.
“I didn’t become this way by choice.”
<Yes, that too I know.>
“So I want you to tell me something that can help me break free! Before the White Queen uses me as she sees fit and destroys me!!”
<…>
The Red Lady fell silent.
Maria had mentioned that the prompt was not enough. It was possible something was lacking in translating human language into the logic or equations of another world. But those fears proved unnecessary.
The Red Lady resumed speaking soon enough.

<Yes, it would seem that you still understand nothing. Nothing at all.>
“What…?”
<You intend to use the Summoning Ceremony – in other words, us – to defeat the White Queen. …You do not understand the fundamental contradiction in that intention.>
“What are you talking about…?”
Kyousuke shook his head like he had seen something unbelievable.
“I know the White Queen is the strongest. There’s no possible answer besides her there. But…but that’s no reason to give up, right!? Someone has to do something, right!? It can be a simultaneous attack from all of the Three or a saturation attack from all of the Unexplored-class! Please tell me, Red Lady! I don’t care how difficult it would be to pull off!! I’ll find a way to do it!! So…!!”
<That is not what I meant, Shiroyama Kyousuke.>
But the Red Lady did not answer his pleas.
She slowly shook her head.
It was like a parent speaking kindly to a stubborn child. It was like a parent correcting her child’s mistaken idea that pushing on the front of the car from the seat would move it forward.
<That is not what it means to fight the White Queen.>
“…”
<You…no, all children of man have made a fundamental misunderstanding. But I am unsure whether or not I should tell you. The answer is simple, but it would certainly shatter your soul if you learned it. That is how thoroughly it would overturn what is supporting your heart.>
“How…?”
Kyousuke felt faint.
He knew humans would give in to the White Queen. He understood that the Regulation- and Divine-classes would be too afraid to fight properly.
But was even the Unexplored-class a lost cause?
Was this the only answer he would get even from the Three at the top?
“How can you just give up…? Are you giving into her strength, Red Lady!? You must have an intelligence and rationality similar to a human’s. You must have a sense of ethics and responsibility. That’s why you approach the human world and give us the Awards!! So you must have noticed the White Queen’s evil! Don’t you understand how disgusting an act it would be to let her have her way!?”
<That is not what I meant.>
The Red Lady seemed to ooze sadness as she continued to shake her head.
<I am saying you are too pure, not too inexperienced. I too have seen more than enough of the White Queen’s atrocities. Yes, I understand and I am aware of your intense emotion. But…you are still wrong on a fundamental level. If you had a proper understanding, you would not view this like that. You would never think that you could defeat the White Queen based on anything we of the Three could teach you.>

“…”
<You should be able to understand how depressingly silly you are being once you see the absolute barrier between the children of man and the White Queen evident in this incident.>
“What…?”
This incident had begun with a mysterious transfer student and the Girl’s Backdoors. It had centered on the Anthill Project and a girl seeking revenge. And it had all been controlled by Biondetta who had remade it all to her liking and enjoyed her rampage.
But Shiroyama Kyousuke had supposedly ended it all.
What about that could be depressingly silly?
<With all the talk of the Anthills behind Isabelle’s secret and the Fifteen Siblings Project from your own past, did you perhaps forget about something?> asked the Red Lady. <Did you forget this was all about the Girl’s Backdoor? Are you sure you did not dismiss it as irrelevant partway through?>
“…”
<This is a story of souls.>
The Lady spoke clearly with her eyes closed.
<The Anthill Project intentionally destroyed and carved away at a human soul to shape it into the ideal vessel. The Fifteen Siblings Project gathered people from around the world and overwrote a portion of their souls to artificially create the bonds of family. …Now, the Girl’s Backdoor that Biondetta used was created from those ideas, but what logic do you think it used?>
“Wait a second.”
<There are a few different symbols of the bonds between a family, between a clan, or between souls. One of those is blood, but isn’t an equally important one…hair? Cultures collect hair in place of the remains or ashes of the deceased. In both the West and the East, an artificial bond of blood can be created by adding hair to a doll of straw or wax, creating the opening for a deadly curse.>
Shiroyama Kyousuke felt an unpleasant itching rising from his left wrist to his elbow.
But it was not on the skin. It was a strange sensation coming from much deeper in his body.
<Biondetta constructed her controller using certain hairs as a catalyst.>
The Lady was not mistaken.
It was said she could see through and even define all calamity, and her words were cruelly accurate.
<Every Unexplored-class has a feminine form. That is why the Girl’s Backdoor can only control the girls who meet those same conditions. That much is correct. But saying it works by the same logic as a vessel interfering with a Material’s mind is partially incorrect. The logic being

used on the human body is the one that a different being uses to gain our obedience.>
The Red Lady spoke her conclusion with a look of true and utter sadness.
<The Girl's Backdoor is a device that sends the White Queen's hair into a puny human body to connect their soul to hers and borrow a portion of her authority. Simply put, it is used to become one with the Queen to borrow that authority. It obtains obedience through fear, just as she does with every Material from the Regulation-, Divine-, and Unexplored-classes.>
His mind was burned away by bright white sparks before breaking into a million pieces.
"Uuh…"
He was rotting.
He was being infected.
Kyousuke felt unbelievable despair at still having that thing – that left arm – still attached to his body.
<Even if it was to investigate it, why did you keep that Girl's Backdoor on your hand so long? Shiroyama Kyousuke, Biondetta, Murasame Kuina… Why was everyone at the center of this incident wearing the same device?>
She was not mocking him.
It was the true pity in her voice that caused each word to tear into Kyousuke's puny soul.
This was not a device that allowed the user to control someone.
Biondetta may have thought that was what she had created, but she had been dead wrong.
Was it a curse the White Queen could use to infect and manipulate those foolish summoners and vessels from within!?
<It was all in the palm of the Queen's hand.>
Had Murasame Kuina, Biondetta, the many other users, and even Shiroyama Kyousuke himself been manipulated by her and turned into her playthings!!!???
<You were seriously mistaken if you thought you were choosing any of this of your own free will, not to mention controlling others. …Sadly, that is the truth of the human world.>
"Owaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"
Kyousuke realized he was screaming.
He did not hesitate for an instant. He grabbed one of the tools from the Stingray's deck. It was a firefighting axe. The dull blade was meant to break through bent doors to secure an exit, but he grabbed it in his right hand and immediately swung it down toward his own left arm…the arm wearing the Girl's Backdoor.

A heavy thunk.
Dizzyingly intense pain.
And what did he get in return?
In that crimson world of the Red Lady.
Shiroyama Kyousuke finally grasped freedom.

As he clenched his teeth and his vision flashed in and out, he saw an unimaginable scene.
His severed left arm rolled along the deck and a thin silver hair crawled out of the dark red cut like a strange parasite.
And it used Kyousuke's own blood to write a red message on the Stingray's deck.
"Ahh, ahh. Just a little further and you would have been mine, brother."
He stopped breathing.
Even his flashing vision froze over as the tiny, crammed-together writing dove into the depths of his mind.
"Whether I could rewrite your soul or not, if these hairs had reached your brain, brother, they could have bound your brain, mixed our thoughts together, and given us the perfect happy ending. Honestly, the world belongs to me, but it never does what I tell it to. But it is true that acquiring you so easily would have been boring, so in that way the world may have planned everything out for the best. Hee hee hee. Oh, but, brother. I love the brave resolve that led you to chop off your own arm the instant you knew the truth. It's just so very like you and so very cute, but I do wish you would show more care for your own body. That's your one and only body, brother. And while I can allow any torment if it comes from me, I honestly

do not like it much when someone other than me hurts you. But I'm not going to deny your agency or dignity as an individual. Oh, then how about this? If you are ever going to harm your own body again – let's say, gouging out an eye, pulling out a tooth, severing a limb, or digging out an organ – then consult me first and tell me about it in advance. Oh, dear. I think I'm being a little too lenient. Is this what they call being the perfect wife? But brother, make no mistake here. Even if I'm being kind, that doesn't mean you can grow dependent on me. If I see any sign of that, I will punish you right away, so don't say I didn't warn you. Yes, and this would be a punishment from me, the strongest who rules above the Regulation-class, the Divine-class, and even the rest of the Unexplored-class. Hee hee hee. Brother, you might be the only thing in the world capable of maintaining your original form after a punishment from me. That would make it quite a rare experience. Yes, very rare. Oh, dear. Oh, dear. This isn't good. You haven't even done anything, but I'm starting to feel like punishing you just for fun. If you like, why not pull some kind of prank; it doesn't matter what. Hee hee. Hee hee hee. Oh, that's right. You just cut off your own arm without even trying to tell me. Honestly, brother. You actually predicted I would feel this way and set everything up for me? This level of mutual feelings can only be called love. Yes, let's call it that, brother."

"…!!!???"

Kyousuke was shocked speechless as he watched the left arm continue to creepily twitch and wriggle.

This was truly a glimpse of the Queen.

With Biondetta, he had only felt displeasure and disgust. He had not felt the White Queen's insanity and fear that seemed to widen every pore on his body just from seeing it.

Now that he could sense it again, he understood.

The Queen was decisive. She was a one-and-only evil that no one could analyze, reproduce, or use. Even a single hair had done this. She broke the rules so badly that the effects and abilities of the Girl's Backdoor no longer even mattered. He became painfully aware that, even at her worst, Biondetta had been "merely human".

This surpassed all the limits. It shook free of the world's upper capacity.

"…Gah…"

But that was all.

Kyousuke was facing his true enemy, but there was nothing he could do. He had lost quite a lot of blood in exchange for his freedom and he collapsed into the red pool of his own making.

His fading consciousness saw the Red Lady's sorrowful look.

And she spoke.

<Feel despair, Shiroyama Kyousuke.>

He clenched his teeth.

<Feel more and more and more despair… Try every possible method you can think of and have them all knocked back down by the White Queen…

Once you have done that, return to me once more. If your heart has been built up by defeat to the point that I believe it will not be shattered by the truth of the world, I will correct your fundamental mistake. Although…>
He could only continue to listen.
Everything grew dark. As his consciousness vaguely floated about, he thought he saw the Lady's tightly closed eyes silently open ever-so-slightly to form blade-like slits.
It was feared that the scarlet light of those eyes could see through and define all calamity.
<Even if you do learn the truth, you have not even a one in a million chance of defeating the White Queen.>
He could never accept that.
With that in mind, the boy's mind was thrown into utter darkness.
To take a short rest, he seemed to shelter himself in a world that was the polar opposite of that frightening pure white.

"Wahhh."
It happened at an unknown time and in an unknown place.
"Wahhhhh. Brother, brother…"
A girl cried in an inhumanly white space. The twintailed girl wore a splendid dress that looked like a modified wedding dress and she was accompanied by a boy. But if anyone had seen her, they might have been confused why she was crying to him like he was her older brother. She was clearly taller than him and her body was clearly more developed. In fact, she had developed enough to warrant the word "alluring".
But that apparent relationship may have been accurate.
The small boy frowned and spoke to her.
"What is it, ****?"
"Well, well you see…"
The twintailed girl sniffed and gestured around to make some kind of plea.
But as the small boy listened, he breathed an almost exasperated sigh.
No, it was not just "almost" exasperated. It was a sigh of utter exasperation.
"Y'know, ****, that isn't going to happen."
"Really?"
"Really."
"Really, really? You aren't going anywhere, brother?"
The small boy looked up at the girl's red and swollen eyes and nodded just once. He did not need to think about it at all. It was the carefree answer of someone confirming the obvious.

“We’re never going to change and I’m not going anywhere. I’ll stay by your side, ****. If you’re that worried, how about we make a promise?”
The boy held out his right hand’s little finger.
“?”
“We make promises like this. It’s called a pinky swear.”
“What kind of effect does this ritual have, brother?”
“Well.”
On that day, Shiroyama Kyousuke gave the following explanation to the White Queen:
“If you break your promise, you have to cut off your own finger.”

Facts

- The member of the Three from the Unexplored-class that lends her power to Government and gives out their Awards is The “Red-Eyed” Lady who Sees Through all Sin and Calamity (f a – a o – a b – e i – f j – c i b – b – d u – a – e i f).
- The Anthill research was meant to develop a high-accuracy and high-depth means of processing conversations with the Red Lady. (Meaning, Isabelle can do “that” with just her own body.) What was known as a classified server was actually the box-shaped occult circle that stably summons the Red Lady.
- Maria actually wanted to end her own Anthill research.
- According to the Red Lady, the White Queen cannot be defeated by anything in the real world or anything in the other world where the Materials reside. In fact, Kyousuke has apparently made a “fundamental misunderstanding” about the Materials and the Summoning Ceremony.
- The Girl’s Backdoor was a device using one of the White Queen’s hairs. Just as a target’s hair is placed inside a straw or wax doll, the Queen’s hair worked its way into the puny human’s body so they could temporarily borrow the Queen’s authority. (In other words, it is a pseudo-fusing of the human and the Queen.)
- If the alternative is being infected by the White Queen, Shiroyama Kyousuke will not hesitate to cut off his own arm. He appeared before Isabelle like normal the following day, so it can be assumed the arm was reattached and fixed in place by a powered cast made of Repliglass.

- There is no hope of victory. But despite knowing that, he still wants to win.

Afterword

「……」

「……」

(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)

あとがき

The unexplored summon:// blood-sign

“……”
“……”
(Postscript Open ??/?? ??:??)
Afterword

Here we are at Volume 3.
This is Kamachi Kazuma.
I was worried that having the White Queen as a temporary ally in Volume 2 had weakened her position as the final boss a little, so this time I focused on making a story that shifted things back into neutral. No matter how cute, love struck, useful, or head-over-heels for her brother she is, I feel like the Queen has to have that depthless insanity that “seems to widen every pore on one’s body just from seeing it”.
Similarly, I went all out dragging Shiroyama Kyousuke down during the ending. However, destroying a part of your body to prove your resolve has long been a part of Japanese culture. The most obvious would be Seppuku/Harakiri, but there is also the Yubikiri-Genman performed in the red light districts and the priests who gouged out one of their eyes which led to the stories of the Hitotsume-Kozou.
The special summon this time was a single hair. That might seem surprising, but deified hair is not all that rare. Cultures around the world think that women’s hair holds special power, so you have the Norse goddess Sif whose blonde hair was wheat or the Greek Gorgons whose hair was said to be countless snakes. Nuns hide their hair because it is said to hold a devilish charm that leads men astray and witches will show off their hair for the same reason. Take that far enough and the hair itself can be raised up as its own unique existence. For example, Japan has a shrine that uses hair as the worshipped divine item. You can find more detailed information by searching for Asaoke no Ke.
I want the Queen to be someone who can infect the world with the tip of a fingernail or a single hair. I want her to be able to toy with the most powerful protagonist and throw him into despair.

The theme this time was the soul. At first glance, this might seem similar to last time’s theme of life. But as you can tell after reading both, this was quite different because it focused on the usage and processing of the soul. There are stories all over the world of placing the souls of the dead in something to speak with them, but that just shows how attractive that power is.
The ultimate form of that is the ability to place a soul in a doll (or to make a remote connection with someone else’s soul). A Japanese person probably thinks of the Ushi no Koku Mairi first of all, but the folklore of Western witchcraft includes methods of sealing blood, a fingernail, a hair, etc. in a wax doll and stabbing pins in it to cast a deadly curse on the oblivious

target. It seems that humans around the world tend to have the same ideas, so I used that for the Girl's Backdoor.
I bet a lot of you thought the Girl's Backdoor sounds extremely vulgar, but if you see what the legends say people asked of the higher beings they summoned, you'll find an awful lot of surprisingly vulgar things. You should find some obvious examples if you look into what you can do if you summon each of Solomon's 72 demons. The benefits of summoning them include things like becoming smarter, finding buried treasure, and becoming popular with the opposite sex. (But aren't you already pretty smart if you can use these summoning techniques?) If I was going to take the theme of summoning seriously without avoiding any aspect, I felt I had to use a theme that included the more vulgar side of things, so I went all out with it here.
That brings me to the Anthill Project which mass-produces vessels who are talent-based and in short supply. If it had succeeded, it would have destroyed the balance between the three major powers, but one important point is that the Meinokawa Sisters of Freedom casually achieved this very goal with almost no real risk. I enjoy creating a twisted and intertwined balance of power rather than a simple pyramid-like inflation of power.
Also, I touched a bit on Shiroyama Kyousuke's "family". …This is only a personal view, but when I see a love comedy where the parents are on overseas business trips for no real reason and a non-blood related sister moves in instead, I can't help but think, "What, did you send the unneeded parent cards to the sacrifice corner to summon the ultimate cute girl card from your deck?" So if the parents aren't necessary, I have a habit of building that fact into the fundamental setting…and this time that reason was quite heavy.
The enemy character of Biondetta was at Freedom's 900 level just like Kyousuke and I had her go on a rampage as a revenge assistant who "helps" people in the opposite way from him. As you know if you read to the end, she was an unquestionably awful person, but did you notice that a portion of that actually applies to Kyousuke as well?
Biondetta was only helping fulfill people's revenge because it makes her feel better than anything else, but Kyousuke saves people for similar reasons. If he fully respected the heroines' positions, his usual "goodbye scene" would not exist. (Of course, it would also be terrible if a heroine he had saved for nothing in return ended up crossing her arms and haughtily ordering him to fight for her to the bitter end.)
It isn't that they are unaware of this contradiction. They are aware of it, but they continue on and turn it into a success. That may be the true tragedy of Kyousuke and Biondetta. (Simply put, they have no one to scold them or stop them. In other words, they have no one they can truly call family.)
Granting her client's wish but taking something unexpected from them truly feels like a demon's contract.

Biondetta could have been a maid, but I made her a waitress instead because I thought it was a nice way of showing her stance as a revenge assistant: I will bring you whatever you might order, but it is up to you to look after your health and wallet.
Also, the White Queen herself is not part of the Fifteen Siblings Project. The story behind her calling him “brother” is a little more complicated than that, so I hope you can try to just imagine it for now.

I give my thanks to my illustrator Ikawa Waki-san and my editors Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. This one started with a midair battle over the Pacific and ended with a naval battle on top of a giant stingray, so I doubt the locations were easy. Thank you very much for going along with all of that.
I also give my thanks to the readers. Now I have finished my presentations on Government, Illegal, and Freedom. But there are still plenty of strange terms to go: the Round Table, the Fifteen Siblings Project, and (most importantly) the Toy Dream Company. I hope you will continue reading.

And I will end this here.

More Materials have shown up now, so maybe a valiant warrior will show up and attempt to analyze the language…
-Kamachi Kazuma

Mitou Shoukan://Blood-Sign — Volume 03

Author: **Kamachi Kazuma** (□□ □□)

Illustrator: **Ikawa Waki** (□□ □□)

Translator: **Js06**

The Unexplored Summon://Blood-Sign

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